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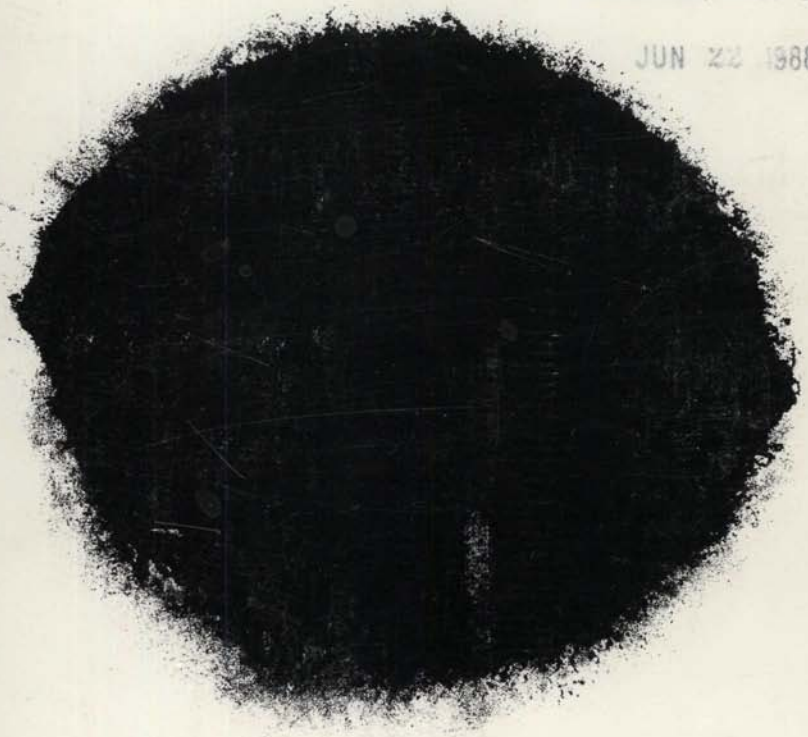

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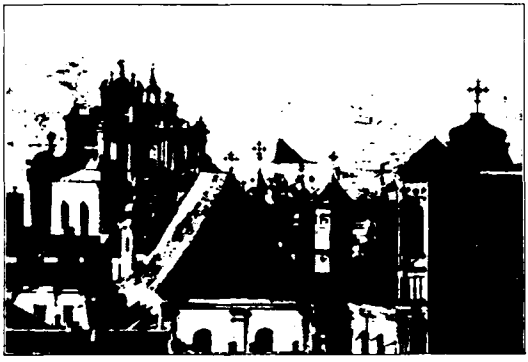

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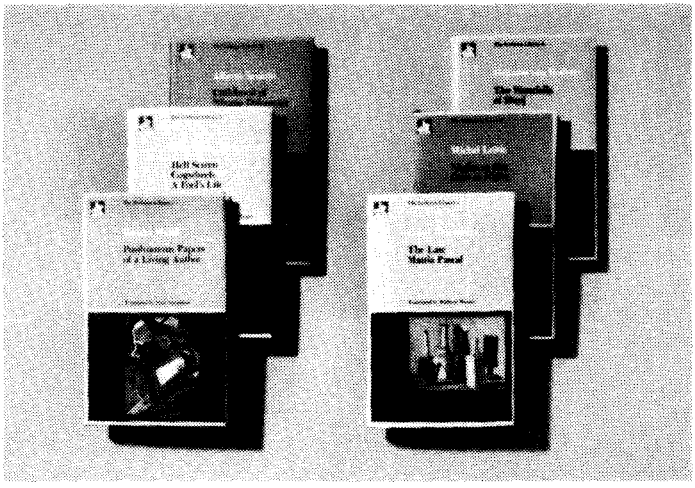

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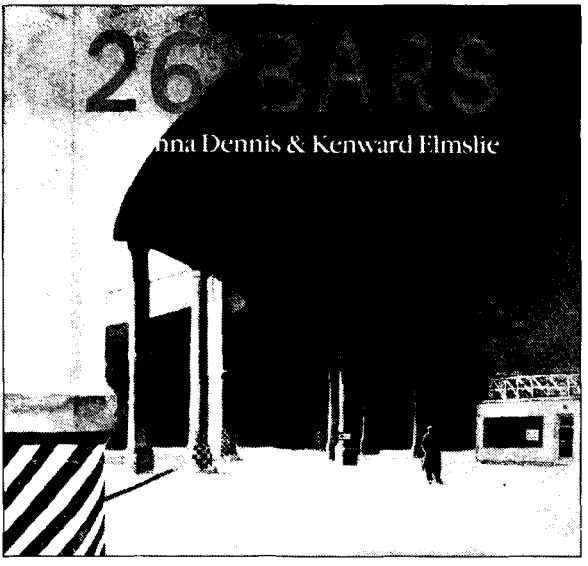

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Stephen Dixon. Cane Hill (Bookpeople, dist.), $8.95 ISBN 0-943433-00-2

Blend together Raymond Chandler, Franz Kafka and James Joyce, and the result is *Garbage*, a novel eminently more appetizing than its name. Shaney Fleet is a third-generation bar owner whose refusal to deal with a criminal garbage-collection service brings him up against a malevolent world of gangsters, corrupt and petty public officials, and a circle of customers and acquaintances who do not share his straight-as-an-arrow sense of right and wrong. Fleet is a classic tough guy, but he proves vulnerable to the forces that, with a doomed inevitability, plot his ruin. The novel, written entirely in the first person with no chapters or other breaks in the narrative, is fast-paced and compelling, and Dixon (*Fall & Rise*, etc.) demonstrates a wonderful ear for dialogue. But there is more here than a good, hard-boiled detective story. In Fleet, Dixon has created an Everyman—a simple, lonely hero, battling powers he knows to be overwhelming and asking only to be left alone. He risks his life to save the bar that is his birthright and to remain in the city—unnamed—that is the only home he has ever known. This work of serious fiction offers no pat resolutions, but ends on a hopeful note as Fleet, momentarily drawn out of his seclusion by a chance encounter with a sympathetic woman, decides to continue his struggle. *Garbage* marks an auspicious debut for Cane Hill.

—Publishers Weekly

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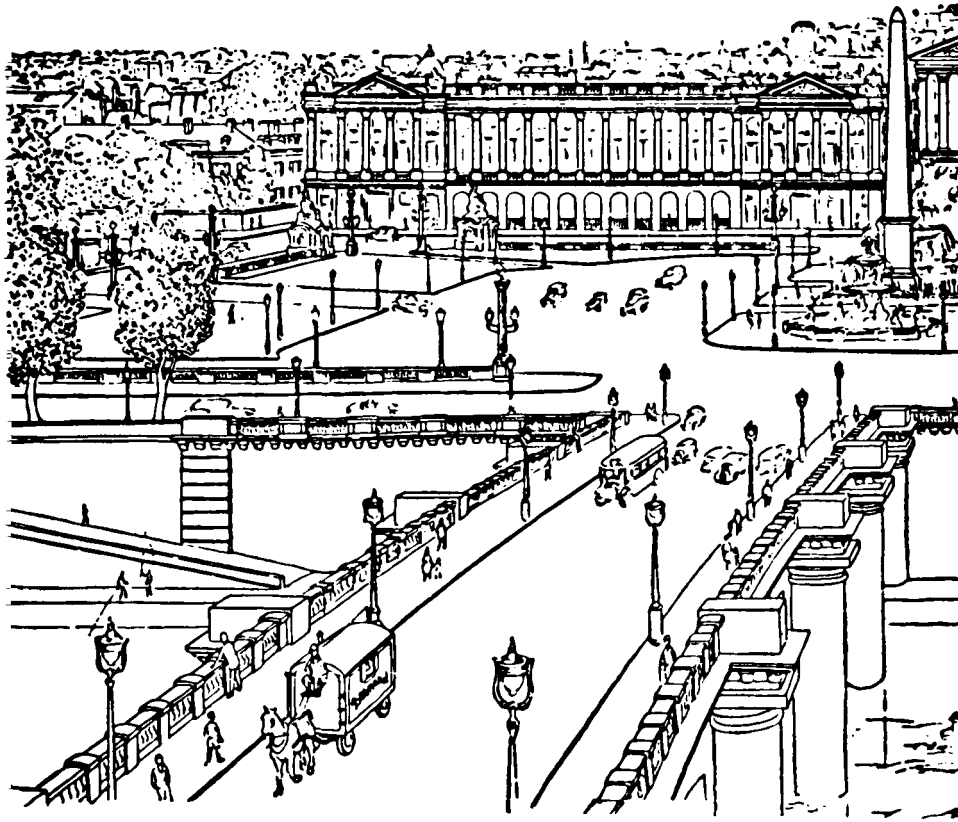

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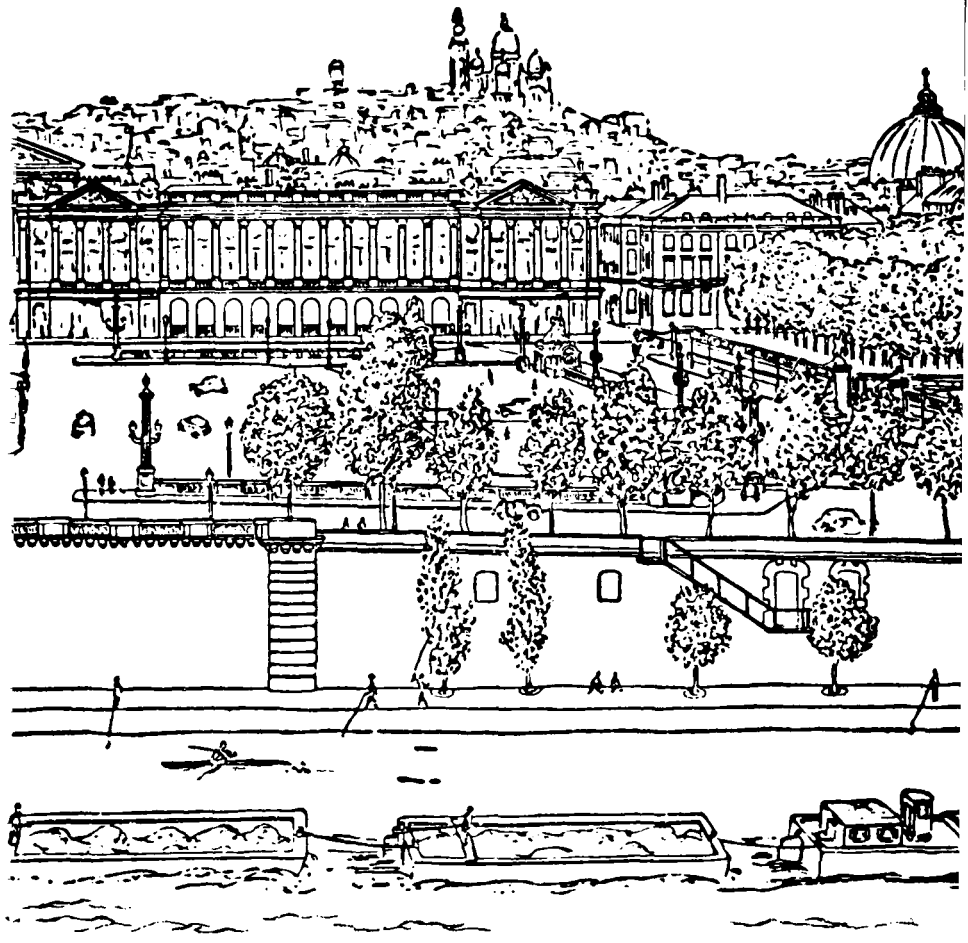

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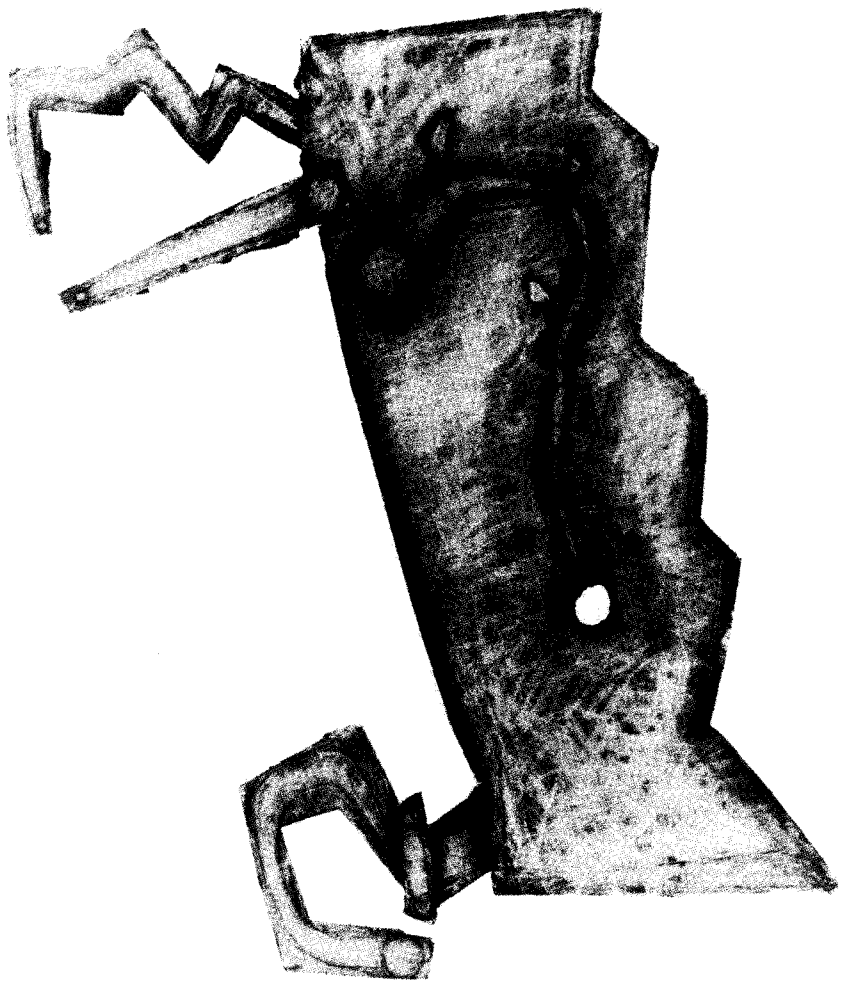

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NOTICE

In 1955, two years after this magazine was founded on the Left Bank, I came back to New York to spend some time at home and to consider the future. My parents had helped with the original stake of the magazine, but I never knew what they actually thought about my involvement with a small literary quarterly, especially one in an embryonic stage, and nor did I ask. I doubted it was what they expected of me—their most positive sentiment perhaps that at least I was doing *something*.

My own feelings were not all that secure either.

The two literary magazine editors I had met up to that time were Princess Marguerite Caetani, the American-born editor of *Botteghe Oscure*, a tri-lingual bi-annual, and Alex Trocchi, Glasgow-born, who in Paris edited a small literary quarterly named *Merlin*. Caetani seemed utterly possessed by what she was doing; she spoke of the joy of hearing the postman's footsteps on the landing, knowing that he had manuscripts in his bag she could snatch from him to peruse. As for Trocchi, he seemed to exemplify the manifesto of his magazine: "*Merlin* will hit at all clots of rigid categories in criticism and life . . ." In the evening he stood on a table in the Cafe Bonaparte and

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declaimed his translations of Apollinaire's bawdy *Les Onze Milles Vierges.* In short, neither typified a manner of life I could imagine myself pursuing for very long. Nor did the manifesto of another literary magazine I happened upon—*The Phoenix* (Henry Miller was the European editor), which proclaimed that "as soon as *The Phoenix* has brought together a group of us—no matter how small—we shall go off to Mexico or South America and take up the life-mode which the Aztecs and Incas let fall."

Then in New York (at the opera in fact) I met James Laughlin. I knew him as the founder and editor of New Directions, an organization which all of us at the *Review* held in great esteem. Though I knew he had published Henry Miller he did not look in need of an Aztec life-mode. After we were introduced out in the corridors behind the boxes he began talking about the *Review.* To my surprise he knew the early issues. He talked about the enterprise as if it were a permanent institution, the way one might talk about the future plans of an old-line publishing house. There was nothing possessed or flakey about him. I remember him as shy, slightly withdrawn. Indeed, he was wearing a dinner jacket.

I don't recall that he ever said, "Keep it up," or any palliatives of that sort as he returned to his seat. Steady involvement with a small literary magazine seemed perfectly natural to him. He was once asked: Do you recall any moments when you wondered whether you really wanted to stay with New Directions. His reply was, "I never had any doubts about that. New Directions is my life."

The Paris Review has gone on for a long time—this issue marking its thirty-fifth year of operation—far longer than most of its kind. There are a number of reasons for this—primarily, of course, that a kind of inured obligation increases as time goes on. There are always new projects, fresh material to publish. But equally important are the examples, people in publishing who have committed themselves to non-commercial enterprises. No one in this regard comes more firmly to mind than James Laughlin. His personal statements

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on the importance of that commitment can be found in his correspondence with William Carlos Williams which appears elsewhere in this issue.

Thus it seems entirely fitting that the staff of this magazine, its present editors and those who have been with it during its life, should dedicate this anniversary issue to him.

—G.A.P.

Jonathan Galassi, the poetry editor of this magazine since 1978, is leaving his position, in part because of his new duties as the editor-in-chief of Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. His post has been taken over by Patricia Storace, an editor of the *New York Review of Books*, a graduate of Barnard College and Cambridge University. Her first book of poems, *Heredity*, appeared last year. The poetry in this issue is Mr. Galassi's final selection.

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Little Expressionless Animals

David Foster Wallace

It's 1976. The sky is low and full of clouds. The grey clouds are bulbous and wrinkled and shiny. The sky looks cerebral. Under the sky is a field, in the wind. A pale highway runs beside the field. Lots of cars go by. One of the cars stops by the side of the highway. Two small children are brought out of the car by a young woman with a loose face. A man at the wheel of the car stares straight ahead. The children are silent and have very white skin. The woman carries a grocery bag full of something heavy. Her face hangs loose over the bag. She brings the bag and the white children to a wooden fencepost, by the field, by the highway. The children's hands, which are small, are placed on the wooden post. The woman tells the children to touch the post until the car returns. She gets in the car and the car leaves. There is a cow in the field near the

Note: This is fiction and where real proper names are used here they denote only objects of public perception and record, not persons alive or deceased.

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fence. The children touch the post. The wind blows. Lots of cars go by. They stay that way all day.

It's 1970. A woman with red hair sits several rows from a movie theater's screen. A child in a dress sits beside her. A cartoon has begun. The child's eyes enter the cartoon. Behind the woman is darkness. A man sits behind the woman. He leans forward. His hands enter the woman's hair. He plays with the woman's hair, in the darkness. The cartoon's reflected light makes faces in the audience flicker: the woman's eyes are bright with fear. She sits absolutely still. The man plays with her red hair. The child does not look over at the woman. The theater's cartoons, previews of coming attractions, and feature presentation last almost three hours.

Alex Trebek goes around the *Jeopardy!* studio wearing a button that says PAT SAJAK LOOKS LIKE A BADGER. He and Sajak play racquetball every Thursday.

It's 1986. California's night sky hangs bright and silent as an empty palace. Little white sequins make slow lines on streets far away under Faye's warm apartment.

Faye Goddard and Julie Smith lie in Faye's bed. They take turns lying on each other. They have sex. Faye's cries ring out like money against her penthouse apartment's walls of glass.

Faye and Julie cool each other down with wet towels. They stand naked at a glass wall and look at Los Angeles. Little bits of Los Angeles wink on and off, as light gets in the way of other light.

Julie and Faye lie in bed, as lovers. They compliment each other's bodies. They complain against the brevity of the night. They examine and reexamine, with a sort of unhappy enthusiasm, the little ignorances that necessarily, Julie says, line the path to any real connection between persons. Faye says she had liked Julie long before she knew that Julie liked her.

They go together to the *O.E.D.* to examine the entry for the word "like."

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They hold each other. Julie is very white, her hair prickly-short. The room's darkness is pocked with little bits of Los Angeles, at night, through glass. The dark drifts down around them and fits like a gardener's glove. It is incredibly romantic.

On 12 March 1988 it rains. Faye Goddard watches the freeway outside her mother's office window first darken and then shine with rain. Dee Goddard sits on the edge of her desk in stocking feet and looks out the window too. *Jeopardy!*'s director stands with the show's public relations coordinator. The key grip and cue-card lady huddle over some notes. Alex Trebek sits alone near the door in a canvas director's chair, drinking a can of soda. The room is reflected in the dark window.

"We need to know what you told her so we can know whether she'll come," Dee says.

"What we have here Faye is a twenty-minutes-tops type of thing," says the director, looking at the watch on the underside of her wrist. "Then we're going to be in for at least another hour's set-up and studio time. Or we're short a slot, meaning satellite and mailing overruns."

"Not to mention a boy who's half-catatonic with terror and general neurosis right this very minute," Muffy deMott, the P.R. coordinator, says softly. "Last I saw he was fetal on the floor outside Makeup."

Faye closes her eyes.

"My husband is watching him," says the director.

"Thank you ever so much, Janet," Dee Goddard says to the director. She looks down at her clipboard. "All the others for the four slots are here?"

"Everybody who's signed up. Most we've ever had. Plus a rather scary retired WAC who's not even tentatively slotted til late April. Says she can't wait any longer to get at Julie."

"But no Julie," says Muffy deMott.

Dee squints at her clipboard. "So how many is that altogether, then?"

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"Nine," Faye says softly. She feels at the sides of her hair.

"We got nine," says the director; "enough for at least the full four slots with a turn-around of two per slot." The rain on the aluminum roof of the Merv Griffin Enterprises building makes a sound in this room, like the frying of distant meat.

"And I'm sure they're primed," Faye says. She looks at the backs of her hands, in her lap. "What with Janet assuming the poor kid will bump her. Your new mystery data guru."

"Don't confuse the difference between me, on one hand, and what I'm told to do," says the director.

"He won't bump her," the key grip says, shaking her head. She's chewing gum, stimulating a little worm of muscle at her temple.

Alex Trebek belches quietly, his hand to his mouth. Everyone looks at him.

Dee says, "Alex, perhaps you'd put the new contestants in the booth for now, tell them we may or may not be experiencing a slight delay. Thank them for their patience."

Alex rises, straightens his tie. His soda can rings out against the metal bottom of a wastebasket.

"A good host and all that," Dee smiles kindly.

"Gotcha."

Alex leaves the door open. The sun breaks through the clouds outside. Palm trees drip and concrete glistens. Cars sheen by, their wipers on Sporadic. Janet Goddard, the director, looks down, pretends to study whatever she's holding. Faye knows that sudden sunlight makes her feel unattractive.

In the window Faye sees Dee's outline check its own watch with a tiny motion. "Questions all lined up?" the outline asks.

"Easily four slots' worth," says the key grip; "categories set, all monitors on the board check. Joan's nailing down the sequence now."

"That's my job," Faye says.

"Your job," the director hisses, "is to tell Mommy here where your spooky little girlfriend could possibly be."

"Alex'll need all the cards at the podium very soon," Dee tells the grip.

"Is what your job is today." Janet stares at Faye's back.

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Faye Goddard gives her ex-stepfather's wife Janet Goddard the finger, in the window. "One of those for every animal question," she says.

The director rises, calls Faye a bitch who looks like a praying mantis, and leaves through the open door, closing it.

"Bitch," Faye says.

Dee complains with a weak smile that she seems simply to be surrounded by bitches. Muffy deMott laughs, takes a seat in Alex's chair. Dee eases off the desk. A splinter snags and snaps on a panty-ho. She assumes a sort of crouch next to her daughter, who is in the desk chair, at the window, her bare feet resting on the sill. Dee's knees crackle.

"If she's not coming," Dee says softly, "just tell me. Just so I can get a jump on fixing it with Merv. Baby."

It is true that Faye can see her mother's bright-faint image in the window. Here is her mother's middle-aged face, the immaculately colored and styled red hair, the sore-looking wrinkles that triangulate around her mouth and nose, trap and accumulate base and makeup as the face moves through the day. Dee's eyes are cigarette-red, supported by deep circles, pouches of dark blood. Dee is pretty except for the circles. This year Faye has been able to see the dark bags just starting to bulge out beneath her own eyes, which are her father's, dark brown and slightly thyroidic. Faye can smell Dee's breath. She cannot tell whether her mother has had anything to drink.

Faye Goddard is twenty-six; her mother is fifty.

Julie Smith is twenty.

Dee squeezes Faye's arm with a thin hand that's cold, from the office.

Faye rubs at her nose. "She's not going to come, she told me. You'll have to bag it."

The key grip leaps for a ringing phone.

"I lied," says Faye.

"My girl," Dee pats the arm she's squeezed.

"I sure didn't hear anything," says Muffy deMott.

"Good," the grip is saying. "Get her into Makeup." She looks over at Dee. "You want her in Makeup?"

"You did good," Dee tells Faye, indicating the closed door.

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"I don't think Mr. Griffin is well," says the cue-card lady.

"He and the boy deserve each other. We can throw in the WAC. We can call *her* General Neurosis."

Dee uses a thin hand to bring Faye's face close to her own. She kisses her gently. Their lips fit perfectly, Faye thinks suddenly. She shivers, in the air conditioning.

"*JEOPARDY!* QUEEN DETHRONED AFTER THREE–YEAR REIGN"

—Headline, *Variety*, 13 March 1988

"Let's all be there," says the television.

"Where else would I be?" asks Dee Goddard, in her chair, in her office, at night, in 1987.

"We bring good things to life," says the television.

"So did I," says Dee. "I did that. Just once."

Dee sits in her office at Merv Griffin Enterprises every weeknight and kills a tinkling pitcher of wet weak martinis. Her office walls are covered with store-bought aphorisms. Humpty Dumpty was pushed. When the going gets tough the tough go shopping. Also autographed photos. Dee and Bob Barker, when she wrote for *Truth or Consequences*. Merv Griffin, giving her a plaque. Dee and Faye between Wink Martindale and Chuck Barris at a banquet.

Dee uses her remote matte-panel to switch from NBC to MTV, on cable. Consumptive-looking boys in makeup play guitars that look more like jets or weapons than guitars.

"Does your husband still look at you the way he used to?" asks the television.

"Safe to say not," Dee says drily, drinking.

"She drinks too much," Julie Smith says to Faye.

"It's for the pain," Faye says, watching.

Julie looks through the remote viewer in Faye's office. "For killing the pain, or feeding it?"

Faye smiles.

Julie shakes her head. "It's mean to watch her like this."

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"You deserve a break today," says the television. "Milk likes you. The more you hear, the better we sound. Aren't you hungry for a flame-broiled Whopper?"

"No I am not hungry for a flame-broiled Whopper," says Dee, sitting up straight in her chair. "No I am not hungry for it." Her glass falls out of her hand.

"It was nice what she said about you, though." Julie is looking at the side of Faye's face. "About bringing one good thing to life."

Faye smiles as she watches the viewer. "Did you hear about what Alex did today? Sajak says he and Alex are now at war. Alex got in the engineer's booth and played with the Applause sign all through *The Wheel*'s third slot. The audience was like applauding when people lost turns and stuff. Sajak says he's going to get him."

"So you don't forget," says the television. "Look at all you get."

"Wow," says Dee. She sleeps in her chair.

Faye and Julie sit on thin towels, in 1987, at the edge of the surf, nude, on a nude beach, south of Los Angeles, just past dawn. The sun is behind them. The early Pacific is a lilac cube. The women's feet are washed and abandoned by a weak surf. The sky's color is kind of grotesque.

Julie has told Faye that she believes lovers go through three different stages in getting really to know one another. First they exchange anecdotes and inclinations. Then each tells the other what she believes. Then each observes the relation between what the other believes and what she in fact *does*.

Julie and Faye are exchanging anecdotes and inclinations for the twentieth straight month. Julie tells Faye that she, Julie, best likes: contemporary poetry, unkind women, words with univocal definitions, faces whose expressions change by the second, an obscure and limited-edition Canadian encyclopedia called *LaPlace's Guide to Total Data*, the gentle smell of powder that issues from the makeup compacts of older ladies, and the *O.E.D.*

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"The encyclopedia turned out lucrative, I guess you'd have to say."

Julie sniffs air that smells yeasty. "It got to be just what the teachers tell you. The encyclopedia was my friend."

"As a child, you mean?" Faye touches Julie's arm.

"Men would just appear, one after the other. I felt so sorry for my mother. These blank, silent men, and she'd hook up with one after the other, and they'd move in. And not one single one could love my brother."

"Come here."

"Sometimes things would be ugly. I remember her leading a really ugly life. But she'd lock us in rooms when things got bad, to get us out of the way of it." Julie smiles to herself. "At first sometimes I remember she'd give me a straightedge and a pencil. To amuse myself. I could amuse myself with a straightedge for hours."

"I always liked straightedges, too."

"It makes worlds. I could make worlds out of lines. A sort of jagged magic. I'd spend all day. My brother watched."

There are no gulls on this beach at dawn. It's quiet. The tide is going out.

"But we had a set of these LaPlace's Data Guides. Her second husband sold them to salesmen who went door to door. I kept a few in every room she locked us in. They did, really and truly, become my friends. I got to be able to feel lines of consistency and inconsistency in them. I got to know them really well." Julie looks at Faye. "I won't apologize if that sounds stupid or dramatic."

"It doesn't sound stupid. It's no fun to be a kid with a damaged brother and a mother with an ugly life and to be lonely. Not to mention locked up."

"See, though, it was *him* they were locking up. I was there to watch him."

"An autistic brother cannot be decent company for somebody, no matter how much you loved him, is all I mean," Faye says, making an angle in the wet sand with her toe.

"Taking care of him took incredible amounts of time. He wasn't company, though; you're right. But I got so I wanted

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him with me. He got to be my job. I got so I associated him with my identity or something. My right to take up space. I wasn't even eight."

"I can't believe you don't hate her," Faye says.

"None of the men with her could stand to have him around. Even the ones who tried couldn't stand it after a while. He'd just stare and flap his arms. And they'd say sometimes when they looked in my mother's eyes they'd see him looking out." Julie shakes some sand out of her short hair. "Except he was bright. He was totally inside himself, but he was bright. He could stare at the same thing for hours and not be bored. And it turned out he could read. He read very slowly and never out loud. I don't know what the words seemed like to him." Julie looks at Faye. "I pretty much taught us both to read, with the encyclopedia. Early. The illustrations really helped."

"I can't believe you don't hate her."

Julie throws a pebble. "Except I don't, Faye."

"She abandoned you by a road because some guy told her to."

Julie looks at the divot where the pebble was. The divot melts. "She really loved this man who was with her." She shakes her head. "He made her leave *him*. I think she left me to look out for him. I'm thankful for that. If I'd been without him right then I don't think there would have been any me left."

"Babe."

"I'd have been in hospitals all this time, instead of him."

"What, like he'd have been instantly unautistic if you weren't there to watch him?"

Among things Julie Smith dislikes most are: greeting cards, adoptive parents who adopt without first looking inside themselves and evaluating their capacity to love, the smell of sulphur, John Updike, insects with antennae, and animals in general.

"What about kind women?"

"But insects are maybe the worst. Even if the insect stops moving, the antennae still wave around. The antennae never stop waving around. I can't stand that."

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"I love you, Julie."

"I love you too, Faye."

"I couldn't believe I could ever love a woman like this."

Julie shakes her head at the Pacific. "Don't make me sad."

Faye watches a small antennaeless bug skate on legs thin as hairs across the glassy surface of a tidal pool. She clears her throat.

"OK," she says. "This is the only line on an American football field of which there is only one."

Julie laughs. "What is the fifty."

"This, the only month of the year without a national holiday, is named for the Roman emperor who. . . ."

"What is August."

The sun gets higher; the blood goes out of the blue water.

The women move down to stay in the waves' reach.

"The ocean looks like a big blue dog to me, sometimes," Faye says, looking. Julie puts an arm around Faye's bare shoulders.

"'We loved her like a daughter,' said *JEOPARDY!* public relations coordinator Muffy deMott. 'We'll be sorry to see her go. Nobody's ever influenced a game show like Ms. Smith influenced *JEOPARDY!*'"

—Article, *Variety*, 13 March 1988.

Weak waves hang, snap, slide. White fingers spill onto the beach and melt into the sand. Faye can see dark sand lighten beneath them as the water inside gets tugged back out with the retreating tide.

The beach settles and hisses as it pales. Faye is looking at the side of Julie Smith's face. Julie has the best skin Faye's ever seen on anyone anywhere. It's not just that it's so clear it's flawed, or that here in low sun off water it's the color of a good blush wine; it has the texture of something truly alive, an elastic softness, like a ripe sheath, a pod. It is vulnerable and has depth. It's stretched shiny and tight only over Julie's high curved cheekbones; the bones make her cheeks hollow, her eyes deep-set. The outlines of her face are like clefs, almost

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Slavic. Everything about her is sort of permeable: even the slim dark gap between her two front teeth seems a kind of slot, some recessive invitation. Julie has used the teeth and their gap to stimulate Faye with a gentle deftness Faye would not have believed.

Julie has looked up. "Why, though?"

Faye looks blankly, shakes her head.

"Poetry, you were talking about," Julie smiles, touching Faye's cheek.

Faye lights a cigarette in the wind. "I've just never liked it. It beats around bushes. Even when I like it it's nothing more than a really oblique way of saying the obvious, it seems like."

Julie grins. Her front teeth have a gap. "Olé," she says. "But consider how very, very few of us have the equipment to deal with the obvious."

Faye laughs. She wets a finger and makes a scoreboard-mark in the air. They both laugh. An anomalous wave breaks big in the surf. Faye's finger tastes like smoke and salt.

Pat Sajak and Alex Trebek and Bert Convy sit around, in slacks and loosened neckties, in the Merv Griffin Entertainment executive lounge, in the morning, watching a tape of last year's World Series. On the lounge's giant screen a batter flails at a low pitch.

"That was low," Trebek says.

Bert Convy, who is soaking his contact lenses, squints at the replay.

Trebek sits up straight. "Name the best low-ball hitter of all time."

"Joe Pepitone," Sajak says without hesitation.

Trebek looks incredulous. "Joe Pepitone?"

"Willie Stargell was a great low-ball hitter," says Convy. The other two men ignore him.

"Reggie Jackson was great," Sajak muses.

"Still is," Trebek says, feeling absently at the pulse in his own wrist.

A game show host has a fairly easy professional life. All five of a week's slots can be shot in one long day. Usually one hard

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week a month is spent on performance work at the studio. The rest of the host's time is his own. Bert Convy makes the rounds of car shows and mall openings and *Love Boat* episodes and is a millionaire several times over. Pat Sajak plays phenomenal racquetball, and gardens. No one is exactly sure what Alex Trebek does with his time.

There's a hit. Sajak throws a can of soda at the screen. Trebek and Convy laugh.

Sajak looks over at Bert Convy. "How's that tooth, Bert?"

Convy's hand strays to his mouth. "Still discolored," he says grimly.

Trebek looks up. "You've got a discolored tooth?"

Convy feels at a bared canine. "A temporary thing. Already clearing up." He narrows his eyes at Alex Trebek. "Just don't tell Merv about it."

Trebek looks around, as if to see who Convy is talking to. "Me? This guy right here? Do I look like that sort of person?"

"You look like a game show host."

Trebek smiles broadly. "Probably because of my perfect and beautiful and flawless teeth."

"Bastard," mutters Convy.

Sajak tells them to both pipe down.

The dynamics of the connection between Faye Goddard and Julie Smith tend, those around them find, to resist clear articulation. Faye is twenty-six and has worked Research on the *JEOPARDY!* staff for the past forty months. Julie is twenty, has foster parents in La Jolla, and has retained her *JEOPARDY!* championship through over seven hundred market-dominating slots.

Forty months ago game-show production mogul Merv Griffin decided to bring the popular game *JEOPARDY!* back from syndicated oblivion, to retire Art Flemming in favor of the waxily handsome, fairly distinguished, and surprisingly intelligent Alex Trebek, the former model who'd made his

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bones in the game show industry hosting the short-lived *High Rollers* for Barris/NBC. Dee Goddard, who'd written for shows as old as *Truth or Consequences* and *Name That Tune*, had worked Promotion/Distribution on the *The Joker's Wild*, and had finally produced the commercially shaky but critically acclaimed *Gambit*, was hired by MGE as the new *JEOPARDY!*'s production executive. A period of disordered tension followed by Griffin's decision to name Janet Lerner Goddard—forty-eight, winner of two Clios, but also the wife of Dee's former husband—as director of the revised show; and in fact Dee is persuaded to stay only when Merv Griffin's executive assistant puts in a personal call to New York, where Faye Goddard, having left Bryn Mawr in 1982 with a degree in library science, is doing an editorial stint at *Puzzle* magazine. Merv's right-hand man offers to put Faye on staff at *JEOPARDY!* as Category-/Question-researcher.

Faye works for her mother.

Summer, 1985, Faye has been on the *JEOPARDY!* team maybe four months when a soft-spoken and weirdly pretty young woman comes in off the freeway with a dirty jean jacket, a backpack, and a *Times* classified ad detailing an MGE contestant search. The girl says she wants *JEOPARDY!*; she's been told she has a head for data. Faye interviews her and is mildly intrigued. The girl gets a solid but by no means spectacular score on a CBE general knowledge quiz, this particular version of which turns out to feature an important zoology section. Julie Smith barely makes it into an audition round.

In a taped audition round, flanked by a swarthy Shriner from Encino and a twig-thin Redding librarian with a towering blonde wig, Julie takes the game by a wide margin, but has trouble speaking clearly into her microphone, as well as difficulty with the quirky and distinctive *JEOPARDY!* inversion by which the host 'asks' the answer and a contestant must supply the appropriate question. Faye gives Julie an audition score of three out of five. Usually only fives and fours are to be called back. But Alex Trebek, who spends at least part of his free time haunting audition rounds, likes the girl, even after she turns down his invitation for a cola at the MGE com-

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missary; and Dee Goddard and Muffy deMott pick Julie out for special mention from among eighteen other prospectives on the audition tape; and no one on the staff of a program still in its stressful initial struggle to break back into a respectable market share has anything against hauntingly attractive young female contestants. Etc. Julie Smith is called back for insertion into the contestant rotation sometime in early September, 1985.

JEOPARDY! slots forty-six through fifty are shot on 17 September. Ms. Julie Smith of Los Angeles first appears in the forty-sixth slot. No one can quite remember who the reigning champion was at that time.

Palindromes, Musical Astrology, The Eighteenth Century, Famous Edwards, The Bible, Fashion History, States of Mind, Sports Without Balls.

Julie runs the board in both rounds. Every question. Never been done before, even under Flemming. The other two contestants, slack and grey, have to be helped off-stage. Julie wins $22,500, every buck on the board, in half an hour. She earns no more in this first match only because a flustered Alex Trebek declares the Final Jeopardy wagering round moot, Julie Smith having no incentive to bet any of her winnings against opponents' scores of $0 and $-400, respectively. A wide-eyed and grinning Trebek doffs a pretend cap to a blank-faced Julie as electric bongos rattle to the running of the closing credits.

Ten minutes later Faye Goddard locates a missing Julie Smith in a remote section of the contestants' dressing area. (Returning contestants are required to change clothes between each slot, conducing to the illusion that they've 'come back again tomorrow.') It's time for *JEOPARDY!* slot forty-seven. A crown to defend and all that. Julie sits staring at herself in a harsh makeup mirror framed with glowing bulbs, her face loose and expressionless. She has trouble reacting to stimuli. Faye has to get her a wet cloth and talk her through dressing and practically carry her upstairs to the set.

Faye is in the engineer's booth, trying to communicate to her mother her doubts about whether the strange new champion can make it through another televised round, when Janet

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Goddard calmly directs her attention to the monitor. Julie is eating slot forty-seven and spitting it out in little pieces. Lady Bird Johnson's real first name turns out to be Claudia. The Florida city that produces more Havana cigars than all of Cuba is revealed to be Tampa. Julie's finger abuses the buzzer. She is on Alex's answers with the appropriate questions before he can even end-punctuate his clues. The first-round board is taken. Janet cuts to commercial. Julie sits at her little desk, staring out at a hushed studio audience.

Faye and Dee watch Julie as the red lights light and Trebek's face falls into the worn creases of a professional smile. Something happens to Julie Smith when the red lights light. Just a something. The girl who gets a three-score and who stares with no expression is elsewhere. Every concavity in that person now seems to have come convex. The camera lingers on her. It seems to ogle. Often Julie appears on-screen while Trebek is still reading a clue. Her face, on-screen, gives off an odd lambent UHF flicker; her expression, distantly serene, radiates a sort of oneness with the board's data.

Trebek manipulates the knot of his tie. Faye knows he feels the something, the odd, focused flux in the game's flow. The studio audience gasps and whispers as Julie supplies the Latin name for the common radish.

"No one knows the Latin word for radish," Faye says to Dee. "That's one of those deadly ones I put in on purpose in every game."

The other two contestants' postures deteriorate. Someone in the audience loudly calls Julie's name.

Trebek, who has never before had an audience get away from him, gets more and more flustered. He uses forty expensive seconds relating a tired anecdote involving a Dodgers game he saw with Dan Rather. The audience hoots impatiently for the game to continue.

"Bad feeling, here," Faye whispers. Dee ignores her, bends to the monitor.

Janet signals Alex for a break. Moist and upstaged, Alex promises America that he'll be right back, that he's eager to inquire on-air about the tremendous Ms. Smith and the even

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more tremendous personal sacrifices she must have made to have absorbed so much data at such a tender age.

JEOPARDY! breaks for a Triscuit advertisement. Faye and Dee stare at the monitor in horror. The studio audience is transfixed as Julie Smith's face crumples like a Kleenex in a pocket. She begins silently to weep. Tears move down the clefs of her cheeks and drip into her mike, where for some reason they hiss faintly. Janet, in the booth, is at a loss. Faye is sent for a cold compress but can't make the set in time. The lights light. America watches Julie Smith murder every question on the Double Jeopardy board, her face and vinyl jacket slickered with tears. Trebek, suddenly and leguminously cool, pretends he notices nothing, though he never asks (and never in hundreds of slots does he ask) Julie Smith any of the promised personal questions.

The game unfolds. Faye watches a new, third Julie respond to answer after answer. Julie's face dries, hardens. She is looking at Trebek with eyes narrowed to the width of paper-cuts.

In Final Jeopardy, her opponents again cashless, Julie coolly overrides Trebek's moot-motion and bets her entire twenty-two-five on the fact that the first part of Peking Man discovered was a fragment of jaw. She ends with $45,000. Alex pretends to genuflect. The audience applauds. There are bongos. And in a closing moment that Faye Goddard owns, captured in a color-still that hangs over her iron desk, Julie Smith, on television, calmly and deliberately gives Alex Trebek the finger.

A nation goes wild. The switchboards at MGE and NBC begin jangled two-day symphonies. Pat Sajak sends three dozen long-stemmed reds to Julie's dressing table. The market share for the last segment of *JEOPARDY!* slot forty-seven is a fifty—on a par with Super Bowls and assassinations. This is 24 September 1985.

"My favorite word," says Alex Trebek, "is 'moist.' It is my favorite word, especially when used in combination with my second-favorite word, which is 'loincloth.'" He looks at the doctor. "I'm just associating. Is it OK if I just associate?"

Alex Trebek's psychiatrist says nothing.

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"A dream," says Trebek. "I have this recurring dream where I'm standing outside the window of a restaurant, watching a chef flip pancakes. Except it turns out they're not pancakes—they're faces. I'm watching a guy in a chef's hat flip faces with a spatula."

The psychiatrist makes a church steeple with his fingers and contemplates the steeple.

"I think I'm just tired," says Trebek. "I think I'm just bone-weary. I'm tired of the taste of my teeth in my mouth. I'm tired of everything. My job sucks string. I want to go back to modelling. My cheek muscles ache, from having to smile all the time. All this hair spray is starting to attract midges. I can't go outdoors at night anymore."

"This girl you work with," says the doctor.

"And Convy reveals today that he's getting a discolored tooth," Trebek says. "Tell me *that* augurs well, why don't you."

"This contestant you talk about all the time."

"She lost," Trebek says, rubbing the bridge of his nose. "She lost yesterday. Don't you read papers, ever? She lost to her own brother, after Janet and Merv's exec snuck the damaged little bastard in with a rigged five-audition and a board just crawling with animal questions."

The psychiatrist hikes his eyebrows a little. They are black and angled, almost hinged.

"Queer story behind that," Trebek says, feeling at his wrist for his pulse. "I got it fourth-hand, but still. Parents abandoned the children, as kids. There was the girl and her brother. Lunt. Can you imagine a champion named Lunt? Lunt was autistic. He and the girl got abandoned out in the middle of nowhere somewhere. Grisly. She was adopted and the brother was institutionalized. In a state institution. This hopelessly autistic kid, who it turns out he's got the whole *LaPlace's Data Guide* memorized. They both like memorized this thing, as kids. And I thought *I* had a rotten childhood, boy." Trebek shakes his head. "But he got put away, and the girl got adopted by some people in La Jolla who were not, from the sense I get, princes among men. She ran away. She got on the show. She kicked ass. She was fair and a good sport and

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took no crapola. She used her prize money to pay these staggering bills for Lunt's autism. Moved him to a private hospital in the desert that was supposed to specialize in sort of . . . *yanking* people outside themselves. Into the world." Trebek takes a breath.

"And I guess they yanked him OK," he says, "at least to where he could talk. Though he still hides his head under his arm whenever things get tense. Plus he's weird-looking. And but he comes and bumps her off with this torrent of zoology data." Trebek plays with a cufflink. "And she's gone."

"You said in our last hour together that you thought you loved her."

"She's a lesbian," Trebek says flatly. "She's a lesbian through and through. I think she's one of those political lesbians. You know that kind? The kind with the anger? She looks at men like they're unsightly stains on the air. Plus she's involved with our ditz of a head researcher, which if you don't think the F.C.C. took a dim view of *that* little liason you've got another. . . ."

"Free-associate," orders the doctor.

"Image association?"

"I have no problem with that."

"I invited the girl for coffee, or a Tab, years ago, right at the start, in the commissary, and she gave me this haunting but also hunting smile. Told me she could never imbibe caffeine with a man who wore a digital watch. The hell she says. She gave me the finger on national television. She's practically got a crewcut. Sometimes she looks like a vampire. Once, in the contestant booth, the contestant booth is where we keep all the contestants for all the slots, once one of the lights in the booth was flickering, they're fluorescent lights, and she said to get her the hell out of that booth, that flickering fluorescence made her feel like she was in a nightmare. And there *was* a sort of nightmary quality to that light, I remember. It was like there was a pulse in the neon. Like blood. Everybody in the booth got nervous." Trebek strokes his mustache. "Odd girl. Something odd about her. When she smiled things got bright, too focused. It took the fun out of it, somehow.

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"I love her, I think," Trebek says. "She has a way with a piece of data. To see her with an answer. . . . Is there such a thing as an intellectual caress? I think of us together: seas part, stars shine spotlights. . . ."

"And this researcher she's involved with?"

"Nice enough girl. A thick, friendly girl. Not fantastically bright. A little emotional. Has this adoration-versus-loathing thing with her mother." Trebek ponders. "My opinion: Faye is like the sort of girl who's constantly surfing on her emotions. You know? Not really in control of where they take her, but not quite ever wiping out, yet, either. A psychic surfer. But scary-looking, for so young. These black, bulging, buggy eyes. Perfectly round and black. Impressive breasts, though."

"Mother-conflicts?"

"Faye's mother is one very tense production exec. Spends far too much time obsessing about not obsessing about the fact that our director is her ex-husband's wife."

"A woman?"

"Janet Lerner Goddard. Worst director I've ever worked with. Dee hates her. Janet likes to play with Dee's head; it's a head that admittedly tends to be full of gin. Janet likes to put little trinkety reminders of Dee's ex in Dee's mailbox at the office. Old bills, tieclips. She plays with Dee's mind. Dee's obsessing herself into stasis. She's barely able to even function at work anymore."

"Image associated with this person?"

"You know those ultra-modern rifles, where the mechanisms of aiming far outnumber those of firing? Dee's like that. God am I scared of being like that."

The psychiatrist thinks they have done all they can for today. He shows Trebek the door.

"I also really like the word 'bedizen,'" Trebek says.

In those first fall weeks of 1985, a public that grows with each Nielsen sweep discerns only two areas of even potential competitive vulnerability in Ms. Julie Smith of Los Angeles. One

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has to do with animals. Julie is simply unable to respond to clues about animals. In her fourth slot, categories in Double Jeopardy include Marsupials and Zoological Songs, and an eidetic pharmacist from Westwood pushes Julie all the way to Final Jeopardy before she crushes him with a bold bet on Eva Braun's shoe-size.

In her fifth slot (and what is, according to the game's publicized rules, to be her last—if a winner she'll be retired as a five-time champion), Julie goes up against a spectacularly fat Berkeley mailman who claims to be a cofounder of the California chapter of MENSA. The third contestant is a neurasthenic (but gorgeous—Alex keeps straightening his tie) Fullerton stenographer who wipes her lips compulsively on the sleeve of her blouse. The stenographer quickly accumulates a negative score, and becomes hysterically anxious during the second commercial break, convinced by the skunked, vengeful and whispering mailman that she will have to pay *JEOPARDY!* the nine hundred dollars she's down before they will let her leave the set. Faye dashes out during Off-Air; the woman cannot seem to be reassured. She keeps looking wildly at the exits as Faye runs off-stage and the red lights light.

A bell initiates Double Jeopardy. Julie, refusing to meet the audience's eye, begins pausing a bit before she responds to Alex. She leaves openings. Only the mailman capitalizes. Julie stays ahead of him. Faye watches the stenographer, who is clearly keeping it together only through enormous exercise of will. The mailman closes on Julie. Julie assumes a look of distaste and runs the board for several minutes, down to the very last answer, Ancient Rome for a Thousand: author of *De Oratore* who was executed by Octavian in 43 B.C. Julie's finger hovers over the buzzer; she looks to the stenographer. The mailman's eyes are closed in data-search. The stenographer's head snaps up. She looks wildly at Julie and buzzes in with Who is Tully. There is a silence. Trebek looks at his index card. He shakes his head. The stenographer goes to $-1900 and seems to suffer something resembling a petit mal seizure.

Faye watches Julie Smith buzz in now and whisper to her mike that, though Alex was doubtless looking for the question Who is Cicero, in point of fact one Marcus Tullius Cicero,

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106–43 B.C., was known variously as both Cicero *and* Tully. Just as Augustus's less common appellation is Octavian, she points out, indicating the card in the host's hand. Trebek looks at the card. Faye flies to the Resource Room. The verdict takes only seconds. The stenographer gets the credit and the cash. Out of the emotional red, she hugs Julie on-camera. The mailman fingers his lapels. Julie smiles a really magnificent smile. Alex, genuinely moved, declaims briefly on the spirit of good clean competition he's proud to have witnessed here today. Final Jeopardy sees Julie effect the utter annihilation of the mailman, who is under the impression that the first literature in India was written by Kipling. The slot pulls down a sixty-five share. Hardly anyone notices Julie's and the stenographer's exchange of phone numbers as the bongos play. Faye gets a tongue-lashing from Muffy deMott on the inestimable importance of researching all possible questions to a given answer. The shot of Julie buzzing in with the correction makes the "Newsmakers" column of *Newsweek*.

That night Merv Griffin's executive assistant calls an emergency policy meeting of the whole staff. MGE's best minds take counsel. Alex is sent out for coffee and Cokes.

Griffin murmurs to his right-hand man. His man has a shiny face and a black toupee. The man nods, rises:

"Can't let her go. Too good. Too hot. She's become the whole show. Look at these figures." He brandishes figures.

"Rules, though," says the director. "Five slots, retire undefeated, come back for Champion's Tourney, in April. Annual event. Tradition. Art Flemming. Fairness to whole contestant pool. An ethics type of thing."

Griffin whispers into his shiny man's ear. Again the man rises.

"Balls in a trough," the shiny man says to the director. "The girl's magic. Figures do not lie. The Triscuit people have offered to double the price on thirty-second spots, long as she stays." He smiles with his mouth but not his eyes, Faye sees. "Shoot, Janet, we could just call this the Julia Smith Show and still make mints."

"Julie," says Faye.

"Right."

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Griffin whispers up at his man.

"Need Merv mention we should all see substantial salary and benefit incentives at work here?" says the shiny man, flipping a watch-fob. "A chance here to be industry heroes. Heroines. MGE a Camelot. You, all of you, knights." Looks around. "Scratch that. Queens. Entertainment Amazons."

"You don't get rid of a sixty share without a fight," says Dee, who's seated next to Faye, sipping at what looks to Faye a little too much like water. The director whispers something in Muffy deMott's ear.

There's a silence. Griffin rises to stand with his man. "I've seen the tapes, and I'm impressed as I've never been impressed before. She's like some lens, a filter for that great unorganized force that some in the industry have spent their whole lives trying to locate and focus." This is Merv Griffin saying this. Eyes around the table are lowered. "What is that force?" Merv asks quietly. Looks around. He and his man sit back down.

Alex Trebek returns in shirtsleeves, with refreshments.

Griffin whispers and the shiny man rises. "Merv posits that this force, ladies, gentleman, is the capacity of facts to transcend their internal factual limitations and become, in and of themselves, meaning, feeling. This girl not only kicks facts in the ass. This girl informs trivia with import. She makes it human, something with the power to emote, evoke, cathart. She gives the game the simultaneous transparency and mystery all of us in the industry have groped for, for decades. A sort of union of contestantorial head, heart, gut, buzzer-finger. She is, or can become, the game show incarnate. She is mystery."

"What, like a cult thing?" Alex Trebek asks, opening a can of soda at arm's length.

Merv Griffin gives Trebek a cold stare.

Merv's man's face gleams. "See that window?" he says. "That's where the rules go. Out the window." Feels at his nose. "Does your conscientious entertainer retain—and here I say think about all the implications of 'retention,' here—" looking at Janet, "I mean does he cling blindly to rules for their own sake when the very goal and purpose and *idea* of those rules walks right in off the street and into the hearts of every Triscuit consumer in the free world?"

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"Safe to say not," Dee says drily.

The man: "So here's the scoop. She stays til she's bumped. We cannot and will not give her any help on-air. Off-air she gets anything within what Merv defines as reason. We get her to play a little ball, go easy on the board when strategy allows, give the other players a bit of a shot. We tell her we want to play ball. DeMott here is one of our carrots."

Muffy deMott wipes her mouth on a commissary napkin. "I'm a carrot?"

"If the girl plays ball, then you, deMott, you start in on helping the kid shelter her income. Tell her we'll give her shelter through MGE. Take her from the seventy bracket to something more like a twenty. Capisce? She's got to play ball, with a carrot like that."

"She sends all her money to a hospital her brother's in," Faye says softly, next to her mother.

"Hospital?" Merv Griffin asks. "What hospital?"

Faye looks at Griffin. "All she told me was her brother was in Arizona in a hospital because he has trouble living in the world."

"The world?" Griffin asks. He looks at his man.

Griffin's man touches his wig carefully, looks at Muffy. "Get on that, deMott," he says. "This hospitalized-brother thing. If it's good P.R., see that it's P'd. Take the girl aside. Fill her in. Tell her about the rules and the window. Tell her she's here as long as she can hang." A significant pause. "Tell her Merv might want to do lunch, at some point."

Muffy looks at Faye. "All right."

Merv Griffin glances at his watch. Everyone is instantly up. Papers are shuffled.

"Dee," Merv says from his chair, absently fingering a canine tooth. "You and your daughter stay for a moment, please."

Idaho, Coins, Truffaut, Patron Saints, Historical Cocktails, Animals, Winter Sports, 1879, The French Revolution, Botanical Songs, The Talmud, 'Nuts to You.'

One contestant, slot two-eighty-seven, 4 December 1986, is

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a bespectacled teenage boy with a smear of acne and a shallow chest in a faded Mozart tee-shirt; he claims on-air to have revised the Western solar calendar into complete isomorphism with the atomic clocks at the U.S. Bureau of Time Measurement in Washington. He eyes Julie beadily. Any and all of his winnings, he says, will go toward realizing his father's fantasy. His father's fantasy turns out to be a spa, in the back yard of the family's Orange County home, with an elephant on permanent duty on each side of the spa, spouting.

"God am I tired," Alex intones to Faye over a soda and handkerchief at the third commercial break. Past Alex, Faye sees Julie, at her little desk, looking out at the studio audience. People in the audience vie for her attention.

The boy's hopes for elephants are dashed in Final Jeopardy. He claims shrilly that the Islamic week specifies no particular sabbath.

"Friday," Julie whispers.

Alex cues bongos, asks the audience to consider the fact that Californians never ("*never*," he emphasizes) seem to face east.

"Just the facts on the brother who can't live in the world, is all I want," Merv Griffin says, pushing at his cuticles with a paperclip. Dee makes soft sounds of assent.

"The kid's autistic," Faye says. "I can't really see why you'd want data on an autistic person."

Merv continues to address himself to Dee. "What's wrong with him exactly. Are there different degrees of autisticness. Can he talk. What's his prognosis. Would he excite pathos. Does he look too much like the girl. And et cetera."

"We want total data on Smith's brother," iterates the gleaming face of Merv's man.

"Why?"

Dee looks at the empty glass in her hand.

"The potential point," Merv murmurs, "is can the brother do with a datum what she can do with a datum." He switches the paperclip to his left hand. "Does the fact that he has as Faye here put it trouble being in the world, together with what have to be impressive genetics, by association," he breathes,

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"add up to mystery-status? Game-show-incarnation?" He works a cuticle. "Can he do what she can do?"

"Imagine the possibilities," says the shiny man. "We're looking way down the road on this thing. A climax type of deal, right? Antigone-thing. If she's going to get bumped sometime, we obviously want a bumper with the same kind of draw. The brother's expensive hospitalization at the sister's selfless expense is already great P.R."

"Is he mystery, I want to know," says Merv.

"He's *autistic*," Faye says, staring bug-eyed. "Meaning they're like trying to teach him just to talk coherently. How not to go into convulsions whenever somebody looks at him. You're thinking about maybe trying to put him on the air?"

Merv's man stands at the dark office window. "Imagine sustaining the mystery beyond the individual girl herself, is what Merv means. The mystery of total data, that mystery made a sort of antic, ontic self-perpetuation. We're talking fact sustaining feeling, right through the change that inevitably attends all feeling, Faye."

"We're thinking perpetuation, is what we're thinking," says Merv. "Every thumb over at Triscuit is up, on this one."

Dee's posture keeps deteriorating as they stand there.

"Remember, ladies," Merv's man says from the window. "You're either part of the solution, or you're part of the precipitate." He guffaws. Griffin slaps his knee.

Nine months later Faye is back in the office of Griffin's man. The man has different hair. He says:

"I say two words to you, Faye. I say F.C.C., and I say separate apartments. We do not I repeat do not need even a whiff of scandal. We do not need a *Sixty-Four-Thousand-Dollar-Question*-type-scandal kind of deal. Am I right? So I say to you F.C.C., and separate pads.

"You do good research, Faye. We treasure you here. I've personally heard Merv use the word 'treasure' in connection with your name."

"I don't give her any answers," Faye says. The man nods vigorously.

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Faye looks at the man. "She doesn't need them."

"All I'm saying to you is let's make our dirty linen a private matter," says the shiny man. "Treasure or no. So I say keep your lovely glass apartment, that I hear so much about."

That first year, ratings slip a bit, as they always do. They level out at incredible. MGE stock splits three times in nine months. Alex buys a car so expensive he's afraid to drive it. He takes the bus to work. Dee and the cue-card lady acquire property in the canyons. Faye explores IRA's with the help of Muffy deMott. Julie moves to a bungalow in Burbank, continues to live on fruit and seeds, and sends everything after her minimal, post-shelter taxes to the Palo Verde Psychiatric Hospital in Tucson. She turns down a *People* cover. Faye explains to the *People* people that Julie is basically a private person.

It quickly gets to the point where Julie can't go out anywhere without some sort of disguise. Faye helps her select a mustache and explains to her about not too much glue.

Extrapolation from LAX Airport flight-plan data yields a scenario in which Merv Griffin's shiny man, *JEOPARDY!* director Janet Goddard, and a Mr. Mel Goddard, who works subsidiary rights at Screen Gems, board the shiny man's new Piper Cub on the afternoon of 17 September 1987, fly non-stop to Tucson, Arizona, and enjoy a three-day stay among flying ants and black spiders and unimaginable traffic and several sizzling, carbonated summer monsoons.

"Dethroning Ms. Smith after 700-plus victories last night was one 'Mr. Lunt' of Arizona, a young man whose habit of hiding his head under his arm at crucial moments detracted not at all from the virtuosity with which he worked a buzzer and board that had, for years, been the champion's own."

—Article, *Variety*, 13 March 1988.

WHAT NEXT FOR SMITH?

—Headline, *Variety*, 14 March 1988.

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Los Angeles at noon today in 1987 is really hot. A mailman in mailman-shorts and wool knee-socks sits eating his lunch in the black guts of an open mailbox. Air shimmers over the concrete like fuel. Sunglasses ride every face in sight.

Faye and Julie are walking around west L.A. Faye wears a bathing suit and rubber thongs. Her thongs squeak and slap.

"You did *what*?" Faye says. "You did what for a living before you saw our ad?"

"A psychology professor at UCLA was doing tests on the output of human saliva in response to different stimuli. I was a professional subject."

"You were a professional salivator?"

"It paid me, Faye. I was seventeen. I'd had to hitch from La Jolla. I had no money, no place to stay. I ate seeds."

"What, he'd like ring bells or wave chocolate at you and see if you'd drool?"

Julie laughs, gap-toothed, in mustache and sunglasses, her short spiked hair hidden under a safari hat. "Not exactly."

"So what, then?"

Faye's thongs squeak and slap.

"Your shoes sound like sex," Julie says.

"I'm going to marry that girl," Alex Trebek tells his psychiatrist, who's manipulating a plastic disc, trying to get a BB in the mouth of a clown.

Dee Goddard and Muffy deMott sit in Dee's office, overlooking the freeway, today, at noon, in the air conditioning, with a pitcher of martinis, watching the *All New Newlywed Game*.

"It's the *All New Newlywed Game*!" says the television.

"Weak show," says Dee. "All they do on this show is humiliate newlyweds. A series of low gags."

"I like this show," Muffy says, reaching for the pitcher that's refrigerating in front of the air conditioner. "It's people's own fault if they're going to let Bob Eubanks embarrass them on national daytime just for a dryer or a skimobile."

"Cheap show. Mel got a look at their books once. A really . . . a really chintzy operation." Dee jiggles a lemon twist.

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Bob Eubanks's head fills the screen.

"Jesus will you look at the size of the head on that guy."

"Youthful-looking, though," Muffy muses. "He never seems to age. I wonder how he does it."

"He's traded his soul for his face. He worships bright knives. He makes sacrifices to dark masters on behalf of his face."

Muffy looks at Dee.

"Actually he's got a wife who's about twelve, is how he does it," Dee says.

"Nice girl, though. She brought brandied peaches to the NBC pot-luck last year? Was that the one?"

"A special grand prize chosen just for you," says the television.

Dee leans forward. "Will you just look at that head. His forehead simply *dominates* the whole shot. They must need a special lens."

"I sort of like him. He's sort of funny."

"I'm just glad he's on the inside of the set, and I'm on the outside, and I can turn him off whenever I want."

Muffy holds her drink up to the window's light and looks at it. "And of course you never lie there awake considering the possibility that it's the other way around."

Dee crosses her ankles under her chair. "Dear child, we are in this business precisely to make sure that that is *not* a possibility."

They both laugh.

"You hear stories, though," Muffy says. "About these lonely or somehow disturbed people who've had only the TV all their lives, their parents or whoever started them right off by plunking them down in front of the set, and as they get older the TV comes to be their whole emotional world, it's all they have, and it becomes in a way their whole way of defining themselves as existents, with a distinct identity, that they're outside the set, and everything else is inside the set." She sips.

"Stay right where you are," says the television.

"And then you hear about how every once in a while one of them gets on TV somehow. By accident," says Muffy.

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"There's a shot of them in the crowd at a ball game, or they're interviewed on the street about a referendum or something, and they go home and plunk down in front of the set, and all of a sudden they look and they're *inside* of the set." Muffy pushes her glasses up. "And sometimes you hear about how it drives them mad, sometimes."

"There ought to be special insurance for that or something," Dee says, tinkling the ice in the pitcher.

"Maybe that's an idea."

Dee looks around. "You seen the vermouth around here anyplace?"

Julie and Faye walk past a stucco house the color of Pepto-Bismol. A VW bus is backing out of the driveway. It sings the high sad song of the Volkswagen-in-Reverse. Faye wipes her forehead with her arm. She feels moist and sticky. She feels like something hot in a plastic bag.

"But so I don't know what to tell them," she says.

"Being involved with a woman doesn't automatically make you a lesbian," says Julie.

"It doesn't make me Marie Osmond, either, though."

Julie laughs. "A cross you'll have to bear." She takes Faye's hand.

Julie and Faye take walks a lot. Faye drives over to Julie's place and helps her into her disguise. Julie wears a mustache and hat, Bermuda shorts, a Hawaiian shirt, and a Nikon.

"Except what if I am a lesbian?" Faye asks. She looks at a small child methodically punching a mild-faced father in the back of the thigh while the father buys Haagen-Dazs from a vendor. "I mean, what if I am a lesbian, and people ask me why I'm a lesbian?" Faye releases Julie's hand to pinch sweat off her upper lip. "What do I say if they ask me why?"

"You anticipate a whole lot of people questioning you about your sexuality?" Julie asks. "Or are there particular people you're worried about?"

Faye doesn't say anything.

Julie looks at her. "I can't believe you really even care."

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"Maybe I do. What questions I care about aren't really your business. You're why I might be a lesbian; I'm just asking you to tell me what I can say."

Julie shrugs. "Say whatever you want." She has to keep straightening her mustache, from the heat. "Say lesbianism is simply one kind of response to Otherness. Say the whole point of love is to try to get your fingers through the holes in the lover's mask. To get some kind of hold on the mask, and who cares how you do it."

"I don't want to hear mask-theories, Julie," Faye says. "I want to hear what I should really tell people."

"Why don't you just tell me which people you're so worried about."

Faye doesn't say anything. A very large man walks by, his face red as steak, his cowboy boots new, a huge tin star pinned to the lapel of his business suit.

Julie starts to smile.

"Don't smile," says Faye.

They walk in silence. The sky is clear and spread way out. It shines in its own sun, glassy as aftershave.

Julie smiles to herself under her hat. The smile's cold. "You know what's fun, if you want to have fun," she says, "is to make up explanations. Give people reasons, if they want reasons. Anything you want. Make reasons up. It'll surprise you: the more improbable the reason, the more satisfied people will be."

"That's fun?"

"I guarantee you it's more fun than twirling with worry over the whole thing."

"Julie?" Faye says suddenly. "What about if you lose, sometime? Do we stay together? Or does our being together depend on the show?"

A woman in terri-cloth shorts is giving Julie a pretty brazen look.

Julie looks away, in her hat.

"Here's one," she says. "If people ask, you can give them this one. You fall totally in love with a man who tells you he's totally in love with you, too. He's older. He's important, in terms

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of business. You give him all of yourself. He goes to France, on important business. He won't let you come. You wait for days and don't hear from him. You call him, in France, and a woman's voice says a French hello on the phone, and you hear the man's electric shaver in the background. A couple days later you get a hasty French postcard he'd mailed on his first day there. It says: 'Scenery is here. Wish you were beautiful.' You reel into lesbianism, from the pain."

Faye looks at the curved side of Julie's face, deep skin of a perfect white grape.

Julie says, "Tell them this man who broke your heart quickly assumed in your memory the aspects of a political cartoon: enormous head, tiny body, all unflattering features exaggerated."

"I can tell them all men everywhere look that way to me now."

"Give them this one. You meet a boy, at your East Coast college. A popular and beautiful and above all—and this is what attracts you most—a terribly *serious* boy. A boy who goes to the library and gets out a copy of *Gray's Anatomy*, researches the precise location and neurology of the female clitoris—simply, you're convinced, to allow him to give you pleasure. He plays your clitoris, your whole body, like a fine instrument. You fall for the boy completely. The intensity of your love creates what you call an organic situation: a body can't walk without legs; legs can't walk without a body. He becomes your body."

"But pretty soon he gets tired of my body."

"No, he gets obsessed with your body. He establishes control over your own perception of your body. He makes you diet, or gain weight. He makes you exercise. He supervises your haircuts, your makeovers. Your body can't make a move without him. You get muscular, from the exercise. Your clothes get tighter and tighter. He traces your changing outline on huge sheets of butcher's paper and hangs them in his room, in a sort of evolutionary progression. Your friends think you're nuts. You lose all your friends. You become more and more dependent on the boy and the boy's circle of friends. He's introduced

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you to all his friends. He made you turn slowly around while he introduced you, so they could see you from every conceivable angle."

"I'm miserable with him."

"No, you're deliriously happy. But there's not much you, at the precise moment you're feeling most complete."

"He makes me lift weights while he watches. He has barbells in his room."

"Your love," says Julie, "springs from your incompleteness, but also reduces you to another's prosthetic attachment, calcified by the Medusa's gaze of his need."

"I told you I didn't want abstractions about this stuff," Faye says impatiently.

Julie walks, silent, with a distant frown of concentration. Faye sees a big butterfly beat incongruously at the smoke-black window of a long limousine. The limousine is at a red light. Now the butterfly falls away from the window. It drifts aimlessly to the pavement and lies there, bright.

"He makes you lift weights, in his room, at night, while he sits and watches," Julie says quietly. "Pretty soon you're lifting weights nude while he watches from his chair. You begin to be uneasy. For the first time you taste something like degradation in your mouth. The degradation tastes like tea. Night after night it goes. Your mouth tastes like tea when he eventually starts going outside, to the window, to the outside of the window at night, to watch you lift weights nude."

"I feel horrible when he watches through the window."

"Plus, eventually, his friends. It turns out he starts inviting all his friends over at night to watch through the window with him as you lift weights. You're able to make out the outlines of all the faces of his friends. You can see them through your own reflection in the black glass. The faces are rigid with fascination. The faces remind you of the carved faces of pumpkins. As you look you see a tongue come out of one of the faces and touch the window. You can't tell whether it's the beautiful serious boy's tongue or not."

"I reel into lesbianism, from the pain."

"You still love him, though."

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Faye's thongs slap. She wipes her forehead and considers.

"I'm in love with a guy and we get engaged and I start going over to his parents' house with him for dinner. One night I'm setting the table and I hear his father in the living room laughingly tell the guy that the penalty for bigamy is two wives. And the guy laughs too."

An electronics shop pulls alongside them. Faye sees a commercial behind the big window, reflected in the fly's-eye prism of about thirty televisions. Alan Alda holds up a product between his thumb and forefinger. Smiles at it.

"You're in love with a man," says Julie, "who insists that he can love you only when you're standing in the *exact center* of whatever room you're in."

Pat Sajak plants lettuce in the garden of his Bel Air home. Bert Convy boards his Lear, bound for an Indianapolis Motor Home Expo.

"A dream," says Alex Trebek. "I have this dream where I'm sitting in a chair on a little hill in the middle of a field. The field, which is verdant and clovered, is covered with rabbits. They sit and look at me. There must be a million rabbits in that field. They all sit and look at me. Some of them lower their little heads to eat clover. But their eyes never leave me. They sit there and look at me, a million bunny rabbits, and I look back."

"Uncle," says Patricia ("Patty-Jo") Lunt, stout and loose-faced behind the cash register of the Holiday Inn Restaurant at the Holiday Inn, Interstate 70, Ashtabula, Ohio:

"Uncle uncle uncle uncle."

"No," says Faye. "I meet a man in the park. We're both walking. The man's got a tiny puppy, the cutest and most beautiful puppy I've ever seen. The puppy's on a little leash. When I meet the man the puppy wags its tail so hard that it loses its little balance. The man lets me play with the puppy. I scratch its stomach and it licks my hand. The man has a picnic lunch

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in a hamper. We spend all day in the park, with the puppy. By sundown I'm totally in love with the man with the puppy. I stay the night with him. I let him inside me. I'm in love. I start to see the man and the puppy whenever I close my eyes.

"I have a date with the man in the park a couple days later. This time he's got a different puppy with him, another beautiful puppy that wags its tail and licks my hand, and the man's hand. The man says it's the first puppy's brother."

"Oh, Faye."

"And but this goes on, me meeting the man in the park, him having a different puppy every time, and the man is so warm and loving and attentive toward both me and the puppies that soon I'm totally in love. I'm totally in love on the morning I follow the man to work, just to surprise him, like with a juice and danish, and I follow him and discover that he's actually a professional cosmetics researcher who performs product experiments on puppies, and kills them, and dissects them, and that before he experiments on each puppy he takes it to the park, and walks it, and uses the beautiful puppies to attract women, who he seduces."

"You're so crushed and revolted you become a lesbian," says Julie.

Pat Sajak comes close to skunking Alex Trebek in three straight games of racquetball. In the health club's locker room Trebek feels at his pulse and complains of fatigue, distraction, difficulty sleeping, odors of camphor and lime. Sajak recommends gardening, for relaxation.

"I need you to articulate for me the dynamics of this connection between Faye Goddard and Julie Smith," Merv Griffin tells his shiny executive. His man stands at the office window, watching cars move by on the Hollywood Freeway, in the sun. The cars glitter.

"You and your mother happen to go to the movies," Faye says. She and Julie stand wiping themselves in the shade of a leather shop's awning. "You're a child. The movie is *Son of Flubber*,

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from Disney. It lasts pretty much the whole afternoon." She gathers her hair at the back of her neck and lifts it. "After the movie's over and you and your mother are outside, on the sidewalk, in the light, your mother breaks down. She has to be restrained by the ticket man, she's so hysterical. She tears at her beautiful fiery hair that you've always admired and wished you could have had, too. She's totally hysterical. It turns out a man in the theater behind you was playing with your mother's hair all through the movie. He was touching her hair in a sexual way. She was horrified and repulsed, but didn't make a sound, the whole time, I guess for fear that you, the child, would discover that a strange man in the dark was touching your mother in a sexual way. She breaks down on the sidewalk. Her husband has to come. She spends a year on antidepressants. Then she drinks.

"Years later her husband, your stepfather, leaves her for a woman. The woman has the same background, career interests, and general sort of appearance as your mother. Your mother gets obsessed with whatever slight differences between herself and the woman caused your stepfather to leave her for the woman. She drinks. The woman plays off her emotions, like the insecure and basically shitty human being she is, by dressing as much like your mother as possible, putting little mementos of your stepfather in your mother's mailbox, coloring her hair the same shade of red as your mother does. You all work together in the same tiny but terrifyingly powerful industry. It's a tiny and sordid and claustrophobic little community, where no one can get away from the nests they've fouled. You reel into confusion. You meet this very unique and funny and sad and one-of-a-kind person."

"The rain in Spain," director Janet Goddard says to a huge adolescent boy so plump and pale and vacant that he looks like a snowman. "I need you to say 'The rain in Spain' without having your head under your arm.

"Pretend it's a game," she says.

It's true that, the evening before Julie Smith's brother will beat

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Julie Smith on her seven-hundred-and-forty-first *JEOPARDY!* slot, Faye tells Julie about what Merv Griffin's man and the director have done. The two women stand clothed at Faye's glass wall and watch distant mountains become Hershey kisses in an expanding system of shadow.

Faye tells Julie that it's because the folks over at MGE have such respect and admiration for Julie that they want to exercise careful control over the choice of who replaces her. That to MGE Julie is the mystery of the game show incarnate, and that the staff is understandably willing to do pretty much anything at all in the hopes of hanging onto that power of mystery and incarnation through the inevitability of change, loss. Then she says that that was all just the shiny executive's bullshit, what she just said.

Julie asks Faye why Faye has not told her before now what is going to happen.

Faye asks Julie why Julie sends all her sheltered winnings to her brother's doctors, but will not talk to her brother.

Julie isn't the one who cries.

Julie asks whether there will be animal questions tomorrow.

There will be lots and lots of animal questions tomorrow. The director has personally compiled tomorrow's categories and answers. Faye's been temporarily assigned to help the key grip try to repair a defectively lit *E* in the set's giant *JEOPARDY!* logo.

Faye asks why Julie likes to make up pretend reasons for being a lesbian. She thinks Julie is really a lesbian because she hates animals, somehow. Faye says she does not understand this. She cries, at the glass wall.

Julie lays her hands flat on the clean glass.

Faye asks Julie whether Julie's brother can beat her.

Julie says that there is no way her brother can beat her, and that deep down in the silence of himself her brother knows it. Julie says that she will always know every fact her brother knows, plus one.

Through the window of the Makeup Room, Faye can see a grey

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paste of clouds moving back over the sun. There are tiny flecks of rain on the little window.

Faye tells the makeup lady she'll take over. Julie's in the makeup chair, in a spring blouse and faded cotton skirt, and sandals. Her legs are crossed, her hair spiked with mousse. Her eyes, calm and bright and not at all bored, are fixed on a point just below her own chin in the lit mirror. A very small kind smile for Faye.

"You're late I love you," Faye whispers.

She applies base.

"Here's one," Julie says.

Faye blends the border of the base into the soft hollows under Julie's jaw.

"Here's one," says Julie. "To hold in reserve. For when you're really on the spot. They'll eat it up."

"You're not going to get bumped. He's too terrified to stand up, even. I had to step over him on the way down here."

Julie shakes her head. "Tell them you were eight. Your brother was silent and five. Tell them your mother's face hung tired from her head, that first men and then she herself made her ugly. That her face just hung there with love for a blank silent man who left you touching wood forever by the side of the road. Tell them how you were left, by your mother, by a field of dry grass. Tell them the field and the sky and the highway were the color of old laundry. Tell them you touched a post all day, your hand and a broken baby's bright-white hand, waiting for what had always come back, every single time, before."

Faye applies powder.

"Tell them there was a cow." Julie swallows. "It was in the field, near where you held the fence. Tell them the cow stood there all day, chewing at something it had swallowed long ago, and looking at you. Tell them how the cow's face had no expression on it. How it stood there all day, looking at you with a big face that had no expression." Julie breathes. "How it almost made you need to scream. The wind sounds like screams. Stand there touching wood all day with a baby who is silence embodied. Who can, you know, stand there forever, waiting

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for the only car it knows, and not once have to understand. A cow watches you, standing, the same way it watches anything."

A towelette takes the excess powder. Julie blots her lipstick on the blotter Faye holds out.

"Tell them that, even now, you cannot stand animals, because animals' faces have no expression. Not even the possibility of it. Tell them to look, really to look, into the face of an animal, sometime."

Faye runs a gentle pick through Julie's moist spiked hair.

Julie looks at Faye in a mirror bordered with bulbs. "Then tell them to look closely at men's faces. Tell them to stand perfectly still, for a time, and to look into the face of a man. A man's face has nothing on it. Look closely. Tell them to look. And not at what the faces do—men's faces never stop moving—they're like antennae. But all the faces do is move through different configurations of blankness."

Faye looks for Julie's eyes in the mirror.

Julie says, "Tell them there are no holes for your fingers in the masks of men. Tell them how could you ever even hope to love what you can't grab onto."

Julie turns her makeup chair and looks up at Faye. "That's when I love you, if I love you," she whispers, running a finger down her white powdered cheek, reaching to trace a line of white onto Faye's own face. "Is when your face moves into expression. Try to look out from yourself, different, all the time. Tell people that you know your face is least pretty at rest."

She keeps her fingers on Faye's face. Faye closes her eyes against tears. When she opens them they're shiny. Julie is still looking at her. She's smiling a wonderful smile. Way past twenty. She takes Faye's hands.

"You asked me once how poems informed me," she says. Almost a whisper—her microphone-voice. "And you asked whether we, us, depended on the game, to even be. Baby?" lifting Faye's face with one finger under the chin. "Remember? Remember the ocean? Our dawn ocean, that we loved? We loved it because it was like us, Faye. That ocean was *obvious*. We were looking at something obvious, the whole time." She

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pinches a nipple, too softly for Faye even to feel. "Oceans are only oceans when they move," Julie whispers. "Waves are what keep oceans from just being very big puddles. They're just waves. And every wave in the ocean is finally going to meet what it moves toward, and break. The whole thing we looked at, the whole time you asked, was *obvious*. It was obvious and a poem because it was us. See things like that, Faye. Your own face, changing expression. A wave, breaking on a rock, giving up its shape in a gesture that *expresses* that shape. See?"

It wasn't at the beach that Faye had asked about the future. It was in Los Angeles. And what about the anomalous wave that came out of nowhere and broke on itself.

Julie is looking at Faye. "See?"

Faye's eyes are open. They get wide. "You don't like my face at rest?"

The set is powder blue. The giant *JEOPARDY!* logo is lowered. Its *E* flickers a palsied fluorescent flicker. Julie turns her head from the sick letter. Alex has a flower in his lapel. The three contestants' names appear in projected cursive before their desks. Alex blows Julie the traditional kiss. Pat Sajak gives Faye a thumbs-up from stage-opposite. He gestures. Faye looks around the curtain and sees a banana peel on the pale blue carpet, carefully placed in the tape-marked path Alex takes every day from his podium to the board full of answers. Dee Goddard and Muffy deMott and Merv Griffin's shiny man hunch over monitors in the director's booth. Janet Goddard arranges a shot of a pale round boy who dwarfs his little desk. The third contestant, in the middle, feels at his makeup a little. Faye smells powder. She watches Sajak rub his hands together. The red lights light. Alex raises his arms in greeting. There is no digital watch on his wrist.

The director, in her booth, with her headset, says something to camera two.

Julie and the audience look at each other.

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David Lehman

Mythologies

I.

The question is not how like the animals we are
But how we got that way. We laugh, for what is a suicide note

But the epitaph of an emotion? Few of us die out in the open;
And when you say thesis, I say antithesis,

But we don't stop there: we take our opposing ideas,
Plant them on opposing cliffs and then build a footbridge

Between them, seemingly flimsy yet sturdy enough in fact
To support a battalion. Hidden behind trees, we watch

The soldiers march across it, single file, too scared
To look down. We cheer them all, all except the boy

In the fairy tale who knew no fear. Him we pity.
He laughs open-eyed, ready to die as we were not.

He is one of us, all right, but better, stronger, stranger.
He asks for more fear than anyone can bear.

II.

The guilty had three choices: awkward chords of candor,
Canned laughter, or the wild hyacinth's sutra, before

Silence returned triumphant, and the journey resumed
In darkness, though the sky above was classically blue.

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Everyone kept his opinion to himself
As harmony dictated, and effigies of Tristan and Isolde

Accompanied their stubborn footsteps across the wild
Terrain. Yet the longing for a loud catharsis

At night renewed their pain. "If only we could climb
Out of these clouds and heartfelt headaches,

Like ravished children in the glory of a snowball fight
After school, and never again have to descend,

Who would not abandon these erotic shipwrecks
And fall asleep like tigers in the destined heights?"

III.

At a festival of conceptual art in Cairo,
I saw a tank buried entirely in snow.

I knew then that silence is the source
Of all music, all laughter, all thought, and so

I stuffed pebbles in my mouth and stood by the sea
And roared my defiance of the waves. It was here,

Years before, that our plane and its shadow
Converged: I ran from the fire, carrying the flames

In my arms. I ran and ran, feeling like a man
Fighting a newspaper on a windy beach, but it wasn't

A beach at all: the sand beneath me was snow,
Is snow, and the spears in the desert sky look like stars.

In the pyramid's triangular shadow, I was the man
Who heard the crimson explosion, and ran. And ran.

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IV.

Keats in one of his letters says, "My Imagination
Is a Monastery and I am its Monk." I wonder.

If a man's imagination is his monastery,
This place looks a lot like an empty railway station,

Kings Cross in London or the Gare St. Lazare in Paris,
A place whose smoke and fog Monet dissolved

Into a chorus of colors. There we stood, my love and I,
Having made our vows under the suspended clock,

Hero and bride. But as we walked away, side by side,
Down the station's sunless nave, amid the excitement

Of the crowd, and foreign languages spoken loud,
We knew our exile had already begun, could hear

The conductor's shrill whistle, could see the light
At the end of the tunnel, where the battlefields begin.

V.

Paradise was hardly what Psyche
With her bleeding blackberries and nervous orgasms

Could have foretold, enjoyed,
And renounced for the sake of some querulous abstraction

Designed to keep us unhappy but alive.
Call it civilization. Call our disobedience instinctive.

Or say we obeyed an angry muse, who ordered us to dance.
"Or else?" I asked. She sighed before answering.

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"Or else a dismal armchair will be your lot
With chamber music your sole narcotic—music that will make

You face your former self, and grieve over incidents
Scarcely recalled, and eat without pleasure, and drink

Without thirst, and dread what shall never come to pass."
In the revelation of our nakedness, we danced.

VI.

"A ball that is caught is fuller, by the weight
Of its return, than the same ball thrown." Our empty hands
say so.

We feel free. In the other room the true believers remain,
The ones who insist that evil is real, the only real thing.

Cannibals and missionaries they are, accomplices in sin,
Greedy for punishment, to inflict or endure it.

We are glad to leave them behind, glad not to have to hear
Their chants and wails. Down the elevator we go

And out into the canyon created by skyscraper shadows.
Yet even we, dedicated as we are to good living,

Sometimes walk around with a lost look on our faces,
As if the blessing for a piece of fruit or cup of wine

Had suddenly come to mind, though cup and plate are empty;
Had come to mind and faded almost instantly away.

VII.

Admit it: you used to walk around thinking there had
To be a reason for things, for everything. That way

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Paranoia lies. Not a science of syllables, the solitude
Total, but the prophet's lit lantern was what you wanted—

And what you got was "neon in daylight," a pleasure
Recommended by Frank O'Hara. Those pleasures meant a lot
to you,

You even thought you lived for them, until the first death
(A nervous uncle broke the news when you landed at Kennedy)

And the first marriage (you stayed up all night and read
"Beyond the Pleasure Principle," a fair description

Of your lovemaking). It seems that new myths are needed
And consumed all the time by folks like you. Each erases
the last,

Producing tomorrow's tabula rasa, after a night of dreams
In which the tigers of wrath become the tigers of repose.

VIII.

Go back to the beginning, to the first fist fight.
They played for high stakes those days. The penalty for losing

Was death or slavery, take your pick. To spare a life
Was the mark of the master; the mark of his slave

Was fear. Noble savage, nothing. Forget about paradise.
My vote goes to Hobbes's "life of man, solitary, poor,

Nasty, brutish, and short." An amazing sentence:
The syllable that ends it also lends it its poignancy,

Since we go on wanting what we can scarcely bear.
Go back, go back, back to when god became a swan

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With beautiful wounded wings, and raped the astonished
maiden.
Back to the dream that stays real when you wake up,

Accustomed to your hunger and clinging to it,
Like a panther accustomed to his cage. Go back.

IX.

A slap in the face, and the face burns with shame.
Anger comes later, comes stranger, looking for someone to
blame.

End of message. Can't see the stars;
Can't say anything that hasn't been said before

By somebody slamming the door; can only repeat
The syntax that brought the crowd to its feet

In the silence that appeased the nightingale.
End of tale. But its moral was simple:

I lost the hearing in one of my ears
And listened with the other to a deaf man's

Symphony. He built a heaven out of his fears
That there wasn't one. End of nightmare.

—The imperfect past, going by too fast,
Begged us to collect it. It couldn't last.

X.

The doctor put his cards on the table.
"Take your pick," he said. He was able

To offer me fear of extinction or fear of pain,
Though freedom from neither. "You mustn't complain."

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In the vertiginous air, the monks wore masks
To keep their germs to themselves and their

Identities a secret. A hero to his own valet,
The Sultan choreographed his murderous ballet

Until Scheherazade, entering the circus tent
With John the Baptist's head on a silver tray,

Told her tale and made the crowd repent.
The curtain dropped and the crowd went on its way,

But no one could say what the nightmare meant,
Or why it was sent to us, or by whom it was sent.

XI.

You can't have it, so you want it, or
You couldn't have it, so you no longer want it, or

You're stuck with it, forever. It was designed with you in mind,
Like the locked door that swung open majestically when you

Spoke the magic words or just answered in the affirmative when
Your name was called. "Here I am, ready to meet you,

Ready to make any sacrifice," you said,
Still in bed, wrestling with an evil angel

In your sleep. You were seventeen years old then
And woke up with a limp. Desire is like that:

The girl knows what you want and cries when
She gives it to you because it was yours because

She whispered your name in your sleeping ear
And said: "Here I am." And was gone a minute later.

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XII.

I met her in one of those sleazebag bars—
I think it was called The Bottom Line—in Buffalo,

Self-proclaimed "city of no illusions," where
Silent men in shirtsleeves sit on bar stools and watch

Girls with tattoos on their buttocks strip
Down to g-strings and panties. They dance to the thump

Of moronic music, grind and hump under hot strobe lights,
And then, when the act is over, circulate among the scumbags,

Gyrating in front of each in turn, making each feel special,
And each, aroused by the mingled smell of musk and sweat,

Folds a dollar and sticks it into her crotch for a tip.
She was different. When I left the bar that night I knew

She would follow, and she did, and I never looked back, never
Glanced at the rear view mirror. All other women turned into her.

XIII.

Her name is Mary but was Miriam before that and soon
She will change it to Alice. What she offered was a shadow

The shape of Europe on the map above the bed of my youth.
Her shawl is all that remains of Europe in the downstairs closet.

It was forbidden to lift up her skirt and look, look.
Yet boys and girls danced across the bridal morning like a bridge

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As the wings of the fog like white sails lingered
Across the bay. I flew, like a caterpillar with wings, into
the new day.

That was the day we buried Europe. We built a dome in air
And in the icy silence of the tomb. To hang like a spider

On a subway strap seemed a suitable fate for some, but we
Lit a candle and watched it cast the shadow of a mountain

In a valley. It was the awful shadow of some unseen power,
A heaven in a wild flower. Europe, bloody Europe was gone.

XIV.

In the dream of your choice, you wake up
In the Garden of Eden, alone except for a whore with a
heart,

Wearing a nurse's uniform. The serpent says:
Listen carefully. This is for your own good.

At the tone it will be eight o'clock.
Nine out of ten physicians recommend

That you surround yourself with the kind of sorrows
That can be instantly relieved by frivolous kisses,

With vegetables as lush as fruits
Ripening in your hands. When the hospital gates are opened,

Don't hesitate, run! And when you arrive at last in the land
Of the free, take your place in line with all of the others

As though nothing had happened between then and now
To make you doubt the conviction that you're blessed.

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XV.

If you were a painter, you'd paint the wind
Green. It would shake the boughs of the honey locust trees.

It would chase the leaves across the continent.
It would scatter the crumbs in a twist of swirling snow.

It would be colorless and green at the same time,
The wind that aligns the pond and the cloud,

The wind that is everywhere, in constant motion,
As buoyant as Ariel and as scornful of gross Caliban,

The wind that holds up the fly ball, drives it back
Into fair territory, causes it to drift within reach

Of the right-fielder, who waves off the second baseman,
Until a last gust lifts the ball over both their heads

And it lands safely for the double that ends the game
In extra innings, costing our team the pennant.

XVI.

After the flood, refreshed, was the first time
You realized that the road to truth was the road

Of flagrant fiction. You surrounded yourself
With symbols (a mountain, a window, an ark,

A rainbow) and mythic creatures (the dove that returned
And the raven that didn't). You understood the dream

Of the old woman who interpreted the sailor's dream.
Then came the other birds, the clouds that come

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When the rain is done, and the wind that signals
The discovery of dry land, a new continent,

As the report of a gun sounds the start of the race,
As the bottle broken beneath the bridegroom's foot

Begins the marriage, as church bells start the funeral
Parade and all the townspeople march in the procession.

XVII.

No longer is there freedom in confusion,
Nor forgiveness in confession,

Nor charm in the old illusion
Of moonlight, the tower, the howling dog, the escaping lovers,

Escaping into midnight in the Western hemisphere,
When the possibilities of expansion still seemed limitless

And the soul could choose among stars without number
In the vast velvet night without end.

—In the midst of other woe than ours, I went to the window
And cured the solitude of the listeners outside

Who shivered in the rain, waiting for the police to come
And ambulance sirens to sound. Drunk I was when

I went to the bathroom, looked in the mirror, and said,
"Dad, Dad, is that you?" In the terror of the night.

XVIII.

"Wherever you follow," he said, "I will lead."
Where summer met fall, she picked up a brittle, orange leaf.

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He wanted to lie on the grass, to lean and loaf
At his ease, but the crisis intervened: news of her unpaid loan

Prompted him to put his sandals on his head, as in the
Zen koan.
Slowly he walked away. Silence followed, then the sound of
a moan

In the room next door. So orange it seemed a painted moon
Shone against the indigo sky. And quickly her mood

Went from unreasonable euphoria to realistic dejection, as
the wood
In the fireplace turned to ash without first yielding a
flame. The wool

Of their sweaters had begun to unravel. "If the fool
Persists in his folly," someone said, "he will have food

Enough to eat, loaves and fishes galore. Worship the good,
Which is beautiful though untrue. Turn your back on gold."

XIX.

If we were painters we'd favor vibrant stripes,
Primary colors, flat surfaces, a lot of white

Remaining on the canvas. If we were composers
We'd take the music of exotic jungles with us

When we visit the vast vacant tundra. "If I were
Rich enough," vowed the philanthropist, "I'd move

To a magnolia mansion and spend my days
Translating modern literature into ancient Greek."

Great plans, distant vistas, a rearguard action
To sabotage the present—and here we've all assembled,

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At the antiseptic airport, with haunted looks on our faces.
Occasional eye contact between man with tan and woman in white.

"You look like your voice," she says, breaking the silence.
The rest of us know where we're going, but we don't know when.

XX.

They've cornered the market on moral outrage. Yes, they have.
The more noise they make about it, the more nervous we get.

They're always telling us just how shallow we are.
The only convictions we have, they say, are on our drivers' licenses.

The charge is not entirely fair to us, though it has its grain of truth.
We tend to luxuriate in our indecisiveness. Not they. No one can say

They lack conviction and passion and certitude. We have our doubts,
Which make us less glamorous and give us

The haunted look we wear. But something in defense
Of our bemused spectatorship must be said: at least it spares us

The postures of those hypocrite lechers, brothers and others
Who sublimate their sexuality into opulent rhetoric and chide us

For not doing the same. They have our best interests at heart.
They may even be happier than we are. We have our doubts.

XXI.

Today's graffiti is in the sky: "More than meets the eye."
Growing up I could tell the months by their smell.

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First come the fruitstand smells of spring in the city,
Then the backyard trees get back their green, and we know

It's the real thing. Poetry in this puzzle of missing parts
Is best represented by clouds in the early evening sky,

Because they constantly change shape, are utterly indifferent
To us, and seem both remote and near at hand

At once. The creation of the world is a ballet
With the dancers and music missing: what you see

Is a miniature stage-set in a museum display case,
And then suddenly you are walking in it, along the Boulevard Raspail,

Until the Eiffel Tower comes into view. Watch it organize
The bridges of the Seine into a coherent surprise.

XXII.

Love accompanies the stranger to his streetlamp
Encircled by singing insects. The song he hears

Meant doom or wax in the mariners' ears.
And now, as the smell of fresh cut grass gives way to the smell

Of brown leaves burning, I want to tell
You what I heard that night, and how the day

Erased it: I woke to the rattle of a passing car
Which, accelerating up the rapidly rising ramp,

Seemed delighted with its capacity for making noise. From far away
I could hear it coming. And just as we know that fame isn't all

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It's cracked up to be, that it can be downright
Nasty in fact, and yet we want it anyway,

So I, too, knew I belonged in one of those cars, tall
Behind the steering wheel, racing to meet the changing light.

XXIII.

Winter came last. Waves of snow from who knows which wind
Turned the meadow beside the frozen waterfall

Into an ocean. The boy in the fairy tale who knew no fear
Soon learned. On the shore of the wide world he could hear

The violins of anger, spelling danger. Poetry in this era of disbelief
Meant staring at a leaf until it turned into a star.

It was easier in the past. All you had to do was sleep outside
And let nature take over. There were more stars in the sky

Than we had room for in our philosophy. And when we woke,
Berries grew beside the burbling brook and bled in our soft hands.

The question was not how like the gods we were
But whether we could recognize them in our sleep

And remember what we had seen, remember them clearly,
When the radio alarm welcomes us into its next musical day.

XXIV.

I live in a boat in front of the door
Depicting the gods as they might have been forgotten

By Lazarus during the tortures of interrogation.
What I see are tombs and yellow stains on the snow.

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Instead of quotations, I will refer to my heart;
Instead of an altar, I will guard the munitions

And drink wine with the sour taste of cork
And eat sour strawberries in the city of New York.

You who've been looking for a lost address,
And mothers who seem to be fighting back their tears,

What made you think you could resist the roar
Of the years as they echo in a cavernous subway station?

Can you see the boat in front of the door?
What was it you forgot during the interrogation?

XXV.

Ovid had it all wrong. The plight of the frightened maiden
Gliding noiselessly into the woods, darting like a deer whose eyes

Were mesmerized by headlights on a cold November night,
Was implausible without the contrivance of arrows: love's dart

Claimed Apollo while the dart of fear pierced Daphne's heart,
And so she ran, deeper and deeper into the woods, losing ground

All the while to Apollo (for love moved faster than fear),
Until the gods, granting her wish, turned the nymph

Into a laurel, which Apollo hopelessly embraced. Poetic justice?
Yes, except it didn't happen that way. Their foot race ended

In a forest clearing, where Daphne, exhausted but unashamed,
Made Apollo watch her undress. He entered her

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At her request, as if his will were an extension of her own.
The trees, inclining their branches, nodded in consent. Love won.

XXVI.

The boy, who was more eager than his father
To live on a raft, sleep in the woods, and study the stars,

Became his father, but not before he hid in a cave, slept in it
Overnight, and was saved by a spider from sure destruction.

The king's soldiers, hot on his trail, saw the web stretch unbroken
In the mouth of the cave, and assumed that no one was there.

What is the correct interpretation of the spider's web?
To the soldiers it meant desolation; to the spider, conquest;

To the grandfather telling the tale, providence. The boy
Sees the dew cling to the web at dawn. The natural camouflage

Of rabbits and snakes isn't lost on him. He notices
The triangle formed by three birds in the bare-branched sycamore.

He can hear the hum of a bee admiring a tulip's genitalia.
And at night, he knows, all the colors are present in the white of the stars.

XXVII.

That was the year I first read Hölderlin.
The evening fell more slowly and the first day of spring

Arrived more suddenly and stayed lovelier longer.
Boys pursued muses and girls impersonated them.

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With the instinct of insects, He and She on the meadow
Mate. What they dreamed stays real when they wake up

In the evening of the first day of spring.
Did they fall out of paradise or were they pushed?

It's unclear, but we next see them enter the gathering dusk,
Hand in hand, and the camera pulls back and the voiceover says,

"Good fortune is even harder to bear
Than the bad fortune that came first. Remember this

About the gods: their own immortality suffices them.
The source of all rivers is a riddle even I cannot solve."

XXVIII.

How little I have changed since then, or how much
Of the change is in the eyes of the beholder

Of a book I lived rather than wrote, whose author
Seems like a stranger to me today. I remember,

For example, wanting to write an apocalyptic parody
Of Milton, in Milton's high style, titled "Eden in Flames."

Adam and Eve celebrated their carnality, and when they woke,
The branches of the fruit trees curved gracefully down

And served them nectar. I couldn't bring myself to describe
Their banishment, and so the project failed. Yet what I heard

When I slept sounded a lot like the chorus of joy
In Beethoven's Ninth, and what I saw when I woke up,

If only for the length of a dream, was a deer,
Eyes mesmerized by headlights, standing motionless in the
middle of the road.

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XXIX.

You could be the only passenger on the bus
Who notices that the driver is blind. I, by contrast,

Have eyes only for lovely you. Give me your hand.
I will kiss it. You are cordially invited to my studio,

Which resembles a psychiatrist's office. Once there, I put on
my glasses,
Read passages out loud from Plato, Hobbes, Marx, and Freud,

And ask you for your opinion of each. Together we analyze
Solitude. There is a meeting of the minds,

And sex follows. It's the first day of spring, and we want
To walk along the river and roll on the grass and take off

Our clothes while leaving the windows wide open. In fact,
We can't wait to get off this bus, which seems to be going

Nowhere fast, as Spring puts her tongue in my ear
And names the forbidden parts of her body.

XXX.

No one could say what the nightmare meant
In the operating theater or the circus tent.

And none of this will help us pay the rent:
Many are called and sleep through the ringing,

But we know it's spring, though we've thrown our watches
away.
Our dreams, stretching across the chasm of day,

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Don't deter us from waking, jumping into our clothes,
Dancing down the avenue, and swinging through

The revolving doors of the future, where we used to live,
The day before yesterday, when we weren't dying.

—The question is whether the raven will return
After his end-of-the-world adventures, after the storm,

When one by one the masks slip off, and the bride embraces
The guilty son: true to the test, remembered and confessed.

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everything they said. Words in their mouths now in June's had a labouring effortful quality, dreadful because of the fluencies so easily available, but to others.

They went off at last, June lingering behind. From her look around the room, I could see she did not want to go. She was regretting not the act but the consequences of it, which might sever her from her beloved Emily.

"What was that about?" I asked.

Emily's bossiness dropped from her, and she slumped, a worried and tired child, near Hugo. He licked her cheek.

"Well, they fancied some of your things, that's all."

"Yes, but ..." My feeling was But I'm a friend and they shouldn't have picked on me! Emily caught this, and with her dry little smile she said, "June had been here, she knew the lay-out, so when the kids were wondering what place to do next, she suggested yours."

"Makes sense, I suppose."

"Yes," she insisted, raising serious eyes to me, so that I shouldn't make light of her emphasis. "Yes, it does make sense."

"You mean, I shouldn't think there was anything personal in it?"

Again the smile, pathetic because of its knowingness, its precocity but what an old-fashioned word that was, depending for its force on certain standards.

"Oh, no, it was personal ... a compliment, if you like!"

She put down her face into Hugo's yellow fur and laughed. I knew

A manuscript page from Doris Lessing's novel Memoirs of a Survivor.

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The Art of Fiction CII
Doris Lessing

Doris Lessing was interviewed at the home of Robert Gottlieb, in Manhattan's east forties. Her editor for many years at Knopf, Mr. Gottlieb is now the editor of The New Yorker, *but she considers their relationship unchanged. Ms. Lessing was briefly in town to attend some casting sessions for the opera Philip Glass has based on her novel,* The Making of The Representative for Planet 8, *for which she has written the libretto. Plans for the opera had been in more or less constant flux, and it was only after a minor flurry of postcards – Ms. Lessing communicates most information on postcards, usually ones from*

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the British Museum—that the appointment was finally arranged.

The interview was conducted on the garden patio. Silvery-streaked dark hair parted in the middle and pulled back in a bun, a shortish skirt, stockings, blouse, and jacket, she looked much like her book jacket photos. If she seemed tired, it was hardly surprising considering the extent of her recent travels. She has a strong, melodious voice which can be both amused and acerbic, solicitous and sarcastic.

While the tape recorder was being prepared, she said, "This is a noisy place here, when you think we're in a garden behind a row of houses." She points across the way at the townhouse where Katharine Hepburn lives; the talk is about cities for a while. She has lived in London for almost forty years, and still finds that "everything all the time in a city is extraordinary!" More speculatively, as she has remarked elsewhere, "I would not be at all surprised to find out . . . that the dimensions of buildings affect us in ways we don't guess." She spoke about spending six months in England before the age of five, saying, "I think kids ought to travel. I think it's very good to carry kids around. It's good for them. Of course it's tough on the parents."

Doris Lessing was born of British parents in Persia in 1919, and went with her family to southern Rhodesia when she was five years old. She moved to England in 1949 with the manuscript of her first novel, The Grass is Singing *(1950), and has lived there as a writer ever since. She has published over twenty-five books: fiction, essays, journalism, and poetry. Her most acclaimed novels include* A Proper Marriage *(1954),* Briefing for a Descent into Hell *(1971),* Shikasta *(1979)—the first work in the "Canopus in Argus: Archives" series— and* The Good Terrorist *(1986). The book for which she is arguably the best known,* The Golden Notebook, *was at its publication in 1962 a groundbreaking novel, both for its technical innovation and for its sociological, particularly feminist, focus, yet it was the one book about which Miss Lessing refused to answer questions. ("You'll find what you need in the preface, I*

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said everything there.") Among her most significant short story collections are The Habit of Loving *(1958),* African Stories *(1965), and* The Stories of Doris Lessing *(1978). "Once upon a time," she has written, "when I was young, I believed things easily, both religious and political; now I believe less and less. But I wonder about more. . . ."*

INTERVIEWER

You were born in Persia, now Iran. How did your parents come to be there?

DORIS LESSING

My father was in the First World War. He couldn't stick England afterwards. He found it extremely narrow. The soldiers had these vast experiences in the trenches and found they couldn't tolerate it at home. So he asked his bank to send him somewhere else. And they sent him to Persia, where we were given a very big house, large rooms and space, and horses to ride on. Very outdoors, very beautiful. I've just been told this town is now rubble. It's a sign of the times, because it was a very ancient market town with beautiful buildings. No one's noticed. So much is destroyed, we can't be bothered. And then they sent him to Tehran, which is a very ugly city, where my mother was very happy, because she became a part of what was called the "legation set." My mother adored every second of that. There were dinner parties every night. My father hated it. He was back again with convention. Then in 1924, we came back to England where something called the Empire Exhibition (which turns up from time to time in literature) was going on and which must have had an enormous influence. The Southern Rhodesian stand had enormous maize-cobs, corncobs, slogans saying "Make your fortune in five years" and that sort of nonsense. So my father, typically for his romantic temperament, packed up everything. He had this pension because of his leg, his war wounds—minuscule, about five thousand pounds—and he just set off into a totally unknown setup to be a farmer. His childhood had been spent near Colchester,

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which was then a rather small town, and he had actually lived the life of a farmer's child and had a country childhood. And that's how he found himself in the veldt of Rhodesia. His story is not atypical of that lot. It took me some time, but it struck me quite forcibly when I was writing *Shikasta* how many wounded ex-servicemen there were out there, both English and German. All of them had been wounded, all of them were extremely lucky not to be dead, like their mates were. It didn't strike me at the time, but it's struck me since.

INTERVIEWER

Perhaps a minor version of the same thing would be our Vietnam veterans coming back here and being unable to adjust, completely out of society.

LESSING

I don't see how people can go through that kind of experience and fit in at once. It's asking too much.

INTERVIEWER

You recently published a memoir in the magazine *Granta* which, according to its title, was about your mother. In some ways it really seemed to be more about your father.

LESSING

Well, how can one write about them separately? Her life was, as they used to say, devoted to his life.

INTERVIEWER

It's astonishing to read about his gold-divining, his grand plans, his adventures . . .

LESSING

Well, he was a remarkable bloke, my father. He was a totally impractical man. Partly because of the war, all that. He just drifted off, he couldn't cope. My mother was the organizer, and kept everything together.

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INTERVIEWER

I get the feeling that he thought of this gold-divining in a very progressive and scientific way.

LESSING

His idea was—and there's probably something true about it somewhere—that you could divine gold and other metals if you only knew how to do it. So he was always experimenting. I wrote about him actually, in a manner of speaking, in a story I called "Eldorado." We were living in gold country. Gold mines, little ones, were all around.

INTERVIEWER

So it wasn't out of place.

LESSING

No! Farmers would always keep a hammer or a pan in the car, just in case. They'd always be coming back with bits of gold.

INTERVIEWER

Were you around a lot of storytelling as a child?

LESSING

No . . . the Africans told stories, but we weren't allowed to mix with them. It was the worst part about being there. I mean I could have had the most marvelously rich experiences as a child. But it would have been inconceivable for a white child. Now I belong to something called a "Storytellers' College" in England. About three years ago a group of people tried to revive storytelling as an art. It's doing rather well. The hurdles were—I'm just a patron, I've been to some meetings—first that people turn up thinking that storytelling is telling jokes. So they have to be discouraged! Then others think that storytelling is like an encounter group. There's always somebody who wants to tell about their experience, you know. But enormous numbers of real storytellers have been attracted.

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Some from Africa—from all over the place—people who are still traditional hereditary storytellers or people who are trying to revive it. And so, it's going on. It's alive and well. When you have storytelling sessions in London or anywhere, you get a pretty good audience. Which is quite astonishing when you think of what they could be doing instead—watching *Dallas* or something.

INTERVIEWER

What was it like coming back to England? I remember J. G. Ballard, coming there for the first time from Shanghai, felt very constrained; he felt that everything was very small and backward.

LESSING

Oh yes! I felt terribly constricted, very pale and damp; everything was shut in, and too domestic. I still find it so. I find it very pretty, but too organized. I don't imagine that there's an inch of the English landscape that hasn't been dealt with in some way or another. I don't think there is any wild grass anywhere.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have any deep urges or longings to go back to some kind of mythical African landscape?

LESSING

Well, I wouldn't be living in a landscape, would I? I'd be living in a reality. It wouldn't be the past. When I went back to Zimbabwe three years ago, which was two years after independence, it was very clear that if I went I would be from the past. My only function in the present would be as a kind of token. Inevitably! Because I'm the "local girl made good." Under the white regime I was very much a baddie. No one had a good word to say for me. You've got no idea how wicked I was supposed to be. But now I'm "okay."

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INTERVIEWER

Were you bad because of your attitude to blacks?

LESSING

I was against the white regime. There was a total color bar. This phrase has completely gone now: "color bar." The only contact I had with blacks was what I had with servants. It's very hard to have a reasonable relationship with black people who have to be in at nine o'clock because there's a curfew, or who are living in total poverty and you are not.

INTERVIEWER

In the *Granta* memoir there's the image of you as a child, toting guns around, shooting game . . .

LESSING

Well, there was a great deal of game around then. There's very little these days, partly because the whites shot it out, or the blacks came and lived off it.

INTERVIEWER

Did you have a desire to be a writer in those early days? You mention hiding your writings from your mother, who tried to make too much of them.

LESSING

My mother was a woman who was very frustrated. She had a great deal of ability, and all this energy went into me and my brother. She was always wanting us to *be* something. For a long time she wanted me to be a musician, because *she* had been a rather good musician. I didn't have much talent for it. But everybody had to have music lessons at one point. She was always pushing us. And, of course, in one way it was very good, because children need to be pushed. But she would then take possession of whatever it was. So you had to protect yourself. But I think probably every child has to find out the way to possess their own productions.

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INTERVIEWER

I just wondered if you thought of yourself as becoming a writer at an early age.

LESSING

Among other things. I certainly could have been a doctor. I would have made a good farmer, and so on. I became a writer because of frustration, the way I think many writers do.

INTERVIEWER

Because you've written novels in so many different modes, do people feel betrayed when you don't stick in one camp or another? I was thinking of the science fiction fans, quite narrow-minded, who resent people who write "science fiction" who don't stick within their little club.

LESSING

Well, it is narrow-minded, of course it is. Actually, the people who regard themselves as representatives of that community seem now to want to make things less compartmentalized. I've been invited to be Guest of Honor at the World Science Fiction Convention, in Brighton. They've invited the Soviet science fiction writers too. In the past there's always been trouble; now they're hoping that *glasnost* might allow their writers to actually come. Actually, it never crossed my mind with these later books that I was writing science fiction or anything of the kind! It was only when I was criticized for writing science fiction that I realized I was treading on sacred ground. Of course, I don't really write science fiction. I've just read a book by the *Solaris* bloke, Stanislav Lem. Now that's real classic science fiction . . . full of scientific ideas. Half of it, of course, is wasted on me because I don't understand it. But what I do understand happens to be fascinating. I've met quite a lot of young people—some not so young either, if it comes to that—who say "I'm very sorry, but I've got no time for realism" and I say "My God! But look at what you're missing! This is a total prejudice." But they don't want to know about it. And I'm always meeting usually middle-aged people

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who say "I'm very sorry, I can't read your non-realistic writing." I think it's a great pity. This is why I'm pleased about being Guest of Honor at this convention, because it does show a breaking down.

INTERVIEWER

What I most enjoyed about *Shikasta* was that it took all the spiritual themes that are submerged or repressed or coded in science fiction, and brought them up into the foreground.

LESSING

I didn't think of that as science fiction at all when I was doing it, not really. It certainly wasn't a book beginning, I don't know, say, "At three o'clock on a certain afternoon in Tomsk, in 1883 . . . "—which is, as opposed to the cosmic view, probably my second most favorite kind of opening, this kind of beginning!

INTERVIEWER

You've written introductions for many collections of Sufi stories and prose. How did your interest and involvement with Sufism come about?

LESSING

Well, you know, I hate talking about this. Because really, what you say gets so clichéd, and it sounds gimmicky. All I really want to say is that I was looking for some discipline along those lines. Everyone agrees that you need a teacher. I was looking around for one, but I didn't like any of them because they were all "gurus" of one kind or another. Then I heard about this man Shah, who is a Sufi, who really struck me. So I've been involved since the early sixties. It's pretty hard to summarize it all, because it's all about what you experience. I want to make a point of that because a lot of people walk around saying "I am a Sufi," probably because they've read a book and it sort of sounds attractive. Which is absolutely against anything that real Sufis would say or do. Some of the great Sufis have actually said "I would never call myself a

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Sufi—it's too large a name." But I get letters from people, letters like this: "Hi, Doris! I hear you're a Sufi too!" Well, I don't know what to say, really. I tend to ignore them.

INTERVIEWER

I imagine that people try to set you up as some sort of guru, whether political or metaphysical.

LESSING

I think people are always looking for gurus. It's the easiest thing in the world to become a guru. It's quite terrifying. I once saw something fascinating here in New York. It must have been in the early seventies—guru time. A man used to go and sit in Central Park, wearing elaborate golden robes. He never once opened his mouth, he just sat. He'd appear at lunchtime. People appeared from everywhere, because he was obviously a holy man, and this went on for months. They just sat around him in reverent silence. Eventually he got fed up with it and left. Yes. It's as easy as that.

INTERVIEWER

Let me ask you one more question along these lines. Do you think that reincarnation is a plausible view?

LESSING

Well, I think it's an attractive idea. I don't believe in it myself. I think it's more likely that we "dip into" this realm on our way on a long journey.

INTERVIEWER

That this planet is merely one single stop?

LESSING

We're not encouraged—I'm talking about people studying with Shah—to spend a great deal of time brooding about this, because the idea is that there are more pressing things to do. It's attractive to brood about all this, of course, even to write books about it! But as far as I was concerned, in *Shikasta* the

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reincarnation stuff was an attractive metaphor, really, or a literary idea, though I understand that there are people who take *Shikasta* as some kind of a textbook.

INTERVIEWER

Prophecy, perhaps?

LESSING

It was a way of telling a story—incorporating ideas that are in our great religions. I said in the preface to *Shikasta* that if you read the Old Testament and the New Testament and the Apocrypha and the Koran you find a continuing story. These religions have certain ideas in common, and one idea is, of course, this final war or apocalypse, or whatever. So I was trying to develop this idea. I called it "space fiction" because there was nothing else to call it.

INTERVIEWER

I have the feeling that you are an extremely intuitive kind of fiction writer, and that you probably don't plan or plot out things extensively, but sort of discover them. Is that the case, or not?

LESSING

Well, I have a general plan, yes, but it doesn't mean to say that there's not room for an odd character or two to emerge as I go along. I knew what I was going to do with *The Good Terrorist*. The bombing of Harrod's department store was the start of it. I thought it would be interesting to write a story about a group who drifted into bombing, who were incompetent and amateur. I had the central character, because I know several people like Alice—this mixture of very maternal caring, worrying about whales and seals and the environment, but at the same time saying, "Well, you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs," and who can contemplate killing large numbers of people without a moment's bother. The more I think about that, the more interesting it becomes. So I knew about her; I knew about the boyfriend, and I had

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a rough idea of the kinds of people I wanted. I wanted people of different kinds and types, so I created this lesbian couple. But then what interested me were the characters who emerged that I hadn't planned for, like Faye. And then Faye turned into this totally destroyed person, which was surprising to me. The little bloke Phillip turned up like this: right about then I was hearing about an extremely fragile young man, twenty-one or twenty-two, who was out of work, but was always being offered work by the authorities. I mean, loading very heavy rolls of paper onto lorries, in fact! You'd think they were lunatics! So he always got the sack at the end of about three days. I think it's quite a funny book.

INTERVIEWER

Really?

LESSING

Well, it is comic, in a certain way. We always talk about things as if they are happening in the way they're supposed to happen, and everything is very efficient. In actual fact, one's experience about anything at all is that it's a complete ballsup. I mean everything! So why should this be any different? I don't believe in these extremely efficient terrorists, and all that.

INTERVIEWER

Conspiracies, and so on?

LESSING

There's bound to be messes and muddles going on.

INTERVIEWER

Do you work on more than one fictional thing at a time?

LESSING

No, it's fairly straight. I do sometimes tidy up a draft of a previous thing while I'm working on something else. But on the whole I like to do one thing after another.

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INTERVIEWER

I'd imagine then that you work from beginning to end, rather than mixing around . . .

LESSING

Yes, I do. I've never done it any other way. If you write in bits, you lose some kind of very valuable continuity of form.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have a feeling of yourself as having evolved within each genre that you employ? For instance, I thought the realistic perspective in *The Good Terrorist*, and even sometimes in the Jane Somers books, was more detached than in your earlier realism.

LESSING

It was probably due to my advanced age. We do get detached. I see every book as a problem that you have to solve. That is what dictates the form you use. It's not that you say, "I want to write a space fiction book." You start from the other end, and what you have to say dictates the form of it.

INTERVIEWER

Are you producing fairly continuously? Do you take a break between books?

LESSING

Yes! I haven't written in quite a while. Sometimes there are quite long gaps. There's always something you have to do, an article you have to write, whether you want to or not. I'm writing short stories at the moment. It's interesting, because they're *very* short. My editor, Bob Gottlieb (who's now at *The New Yorker*) said, quite by chance, that no one ever sends him very short stories, and he found this interesting. I thought, "My God, I haven't written a very short story for years." So I'm writing them around 1500 words, and it's very good discipline.

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I'm enjoying that. I've done several, and I think I'm going to call them "London Sketches," because they're all about London.

INTERVIEWER

So they're not parables, or exotic in any way?

LESSING

No, not at all. They're absolutely realistic. I wander about London quite a lot. And any city, of course, is a theatre, isn't it? Total drama!

INTERVIEWER

Do you have regular working habits?

LESSING

It doesn't matter, because it's just habits. When I was bringing up a child I taught myself to write in very short concentrated bursts. If I had a weekend, or a week, I'd do unbelievable amounts of work. Now those habits tend to be ingrained. In fact, I'd do much better if I could go more slowly. But it's a habit. People always ask, of course, as if it matters. I've noticed that most women write like that, whereas Graham Greene, I understand, writes 200 perfect words every day! So I'm told! Actually, I think I write much better if I'm flowing. You start something off, and at first it's a bit jagged, awkward, but then there's a point where there's a click and you suddenly become quite fluent. That's when I think I'm writing well. I don't write well when I'm sitting there sweating about every single phrase.

INTERVIEWER

What kind of a reader are you these days? Do you read contemporary fiction?

LESSING

I read a great deal. I'm very fast, thank God, because I could never cope with it otherwise. Writers, of course, get sent enormous amounts of books from publishers. I get eight or nine

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or ten books a week which is a terrible burden, because I'm always very conscientious. You do get a pretty good idea of what a book's like in the first chapter or two. And if I like it at all, I'll go on. That's unfair, of course, because you could be in a bad mood, or terribly absorbed in your own thing. Then there are the writers I admire, and I'll always read their latest books. And, of course, there's a good deal of what people tell me I should read. So I'm always reading.

INTERVIEWER

Could you tell us more about how you put the "Jane Somers" hoax over on the critical establishment? It strikes me as an incredibly generous thing to do, first of all, to put a pseudonym on two long novels to try to show the way young novelists are treated.

LESSING

Well, it wasn't going to be two to begin with! It was meant to be one. What happened was, I wrote the first book and I told the agent that I wanted to sell it as a first novel . . . written by a woman journalist in London. I wanted an identity that was parallel to mine, not too different. So my agent knew, and he sent it off. My two English publishers turned it down. I saw the readers' reports, which were very patronizing. Really astonishingly patronizing! The third publisher, Michael Joseph (the publisher of my first book) was then run by a very clever woman called Phillipa Harrison, who said to my agent, "this reminds me of the early Doris Lessing." We got into a panic because we didn't want her going around saying that! So we took her to lunch and I said, "This *is* me, can you go along with it?" She was upset to begin with, but then she really enjoyed it all. Bob Gottlieb, who was then my editor at Knopf in the States, guessed, and so that was three people. Then the French publisher rang me up and said, "I've just bought a book by an English writer, but I wonder if you haven't been helping her a bit!" So I told him. So in all, four or five people knew. We all expected that when the book came out, everyone would guess. Well, before publication it was sent to

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all the experts on my work, and none of them guessed. All writers feel terribly caged by these experts—the writers become their property. So, it was bloody marvelous! It was the best thing that happened! Four publishers in Europe bought it not knowing it was me, and that was nice. Then the book came out, and I got the reviews a first novel gets, small reviews, mostly by women journalists, who thought that I was one of their number. Then Jane Somers got a lot of fan letters, mostly non-literary, from people looking after old people and going crazy. And a lot of social workers, either disagreeing or agreeing, but all saying they were pleased I'd written it. So then I thought, "Okay, I shall write another one." By then I was quite fascinated with Jane Somers. When you're writing in the first person, you can't stray too far out of what is appropriate for that person. Jane Somers is middle class, English, from a very limited background. There are very few things more narrow than the English middle class. She didn't go to university. She started working very young, went straight to the office. Her life was in the office. She had a marriage that was no marriage. She didn't have children. She didn't really like going abroad. When she went abroad with her husband, or on trips for her firm and her office, she was pleased to get home. She was just about as narrow in her experience as you can get. So in the writing, I had to cut out all kinds of things that came to my pen, as it were. Out! Out! She's a very ordinary woman. She's very definite in her views about what is right and what is wrong.

INTERVIEWER

What to wear . . .

LESSING

Everything! I have a friend who is desperately concerned with her dress. The agonies she goes through to achieve this martyrdom I wouldn't wish on anyone! Jane Somers was put together from various people. Another was my mother. I wondered what she would be like if she were young now, in London. A third one was a woman I knew who used to say, "I had

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a perfectly happy childhood. I adored my parents. I liked my brother. We had plenty of money. I loved going to school. I was married young, I adored my husband"—she goes on like this. But then, her husband dies suddenly. And from becoming a rather charming child-woman, she became a person. So I used all these things to make one person. It's amazing what you find out about yourself when you write in the first person about someone very different from you.

INTERVIEWER

Your original idea with the Jane Somers books was to probe the literary establishment?

LESSING

Yes. I've been close to the literary machine now for a long time. I know what's good about it and what's bad about it. It's not the publishers I've had it in for so much as the reviewers and the critics, whom I find extraordinarily predictable. I knew everything that was going to happen with that book! Just before I came clean I had an interview with Canadian television. They asked, "Well what do you think's going to happen?" and I said, "The English critics are going to say that the book is no good." Exactly! I had these sour nasty little reviews. In the meantime the book did very well in every other country.

INTERVIEWER

In your preface to *Shikasta* you wrote that people really didn't know how extraordinary a time this was in terms of the availability of all kinds of books. Do you feel that in fact we're going to be leaving the culture of the book? How precarious a situation do you see it?

LESSING

Well, don't forget, I remember World War II when there were very few books, very little paper available. For me to walk into a shop or look at a list and see anything that I want, or almost anything, is like a kind of miracle. In hard times, who knows if we're going to have that luxury or not?

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INTERVIEWER

Do you feel any sense of responsibility in presenting these prophesies aside from telling a good story?

LESSING

I know people say things like, "I regard you as rather a prophet." But there's nothing I've said that hasn't been, for example, in the *New Scientist* for the last twenty years. Nothing! So why am I called a prophet, and they are not?

INTERVIEWER

You write better.

LESSING

Well, I was going to say, I present it in a more interesting way. I do think that sometimes I hit a kind of wavelength—though I think a lot of writers do this—where I anticipate events. But I don't think it's very much, really. I think a writer's job is to provoke questions. I like to think that if someone's read a book of mine, they've had—I don't know what—the literary equivalent of a shower. Something that would start them thinking in a slightly different way perhaps. That's what I think writers are for. This is what our function is. We spend all our time thinking about how things work, why things happen, which means that we are more sensitive to what's going on.

INTERVIEWER

Did you ever do any of those sixties experiments with hallucinogens, that sort of thing?

LESSING

I did take mescaline once. I'm glad I did, but I'll never do it again. I did it under very bad auspices. The two people who got me the mescaline were much too responsible! They sat there the whole time, and that meant, for one thing, that I only discovered the "hostess" aspect of my personality, because

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what I was doing was presenting the damn experience to them the whole time! Partly in order to protect what I was really feeling. What should have happened was for them to let me alone. I suppose they were afraid I was going to jump out of a window. I am not the kind of person who would do such a thing! And then I wept most of the time. Which was of no importance, and they were terribly upset by this, which irritated me. So the whole thing could have been better. It's done. But I wouldn't do it again. Chiefly because I've known people who had such bad trips. I have a friend who took mescaline once. The whole experience was a nightmare that kept on being a nightmare—people's heads came rolling off their shoulders for months. Awful! I don't want that.

INTERVIEWER

Do you travel a great deal?

LESSING

Too much, I mean to stop!

INTERVIEWER

Mostly for obligations?

LESSING

Just business, promoting, you know. Writers are supposed to sell their books! Astonishing development! I'll tell you where I've been this year, for my publishers: I was in Spain . . . Barcelona and Madrid, which is enjoyable, of course. Then I went to Brazil, where I discovered—I didn't know this—that I sell rather well there. Particularly, of course, space fiction. They're very much into all that. Then I went to San Francisco. They said, "While you're here, you might as well . . . "—that phrase, "you might as well"—"pop up the coast to Portland." You've been there?

INTERVIEWER

No, never.

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LESSING

Now that is an experience! In San Francisco, they're immensely hedonistic, cynical, good-natured, amiable, easygoing, and well-dressed—in a casual way. Half an hour in the plane and you're in a rather straight-laced formal city that doesn't go in for casual behavior at all. It's amazing, just up the coast there. This is what America's like. Then I went to Finland for the second time. They've got some of the best bookstores in the world! Marvelous, wonderful! They say it's because of those long, dark nights! Now I'm here. Next I'm going to be in Brighton, for the science fiction convention. Then I won a prize in Italy called the Mondello Prize, which they give in Sicily. I said, "Why Sicily?" and they said, deadpan, "Well, you see, Sicily's got a bad image because of the Mafia . . ." So I'll go to Sicily, and then I shall work for all the winter.

INTERVIEWER

I hear you've been working on a "space opera" with Philip Glass.

LESSING

What happens to books is so astonishing to me! Who would have thought *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* would turn into an opera? I mean it's so surprising!

INTERVIEWER

How did that come about?

LESSING

Well, Philip Glass wrote to me, and said he'd like to make an opera, and we met.

INTERVIEWER

Had you known much of his music before?

LESSING

Well, no I hadn't! He sent some of his music. It took quite a bit of time for my ears to come to terms with it. My ear was

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always expecting something else to happen. You know what I mean? It's interesting enough. I don't find it surprising now; I have no problems with it whatsoever. Then we met and we talked about it, and it went very well, which is astonishing because we couldn't be more different. We just get on! We've never had one sentence worth of difficulty over anything, ever. He said the book appealed to him, and I thought he was right, because it's suitable for his music. We met, usually not for enormous sessions, a day here and a day there, and decided what we would do, or not do. I wrote the libretto.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever done anything like that before?

LESSING

No, never with music.

INTERVIEWER

Did you have music to work from?

LESSING

No, we started with the libretto. We've done six versions of the story so far, because it is a story, unlike most of the things he does. As something was done, he would do the music, saying he'd like six more lines here or three lines out there. That was a great challenge.

INTERVIEWER

Can you say anything about your next project?

LESSING

Yes, my next book is a little book. It's a short story that grew. The joke is that a short novel in England is very much liked. They're not terribly popular here in the U.S. They like big books here. Getting your money's worth. It's about a very ordinary family that gives birth to a goblin. And this is realism. I got the idea from two sources. One was from this fantastic writer called Loren Eiseley. He wrote a piece—I can't remem-

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ber what it was actually about—where he's walking up the seashore in the dusk, and on a country road he sees a girl that he says is a Neanderthal girl: a country girl in a country district, nothing very much to be asked of her, hardly noticed except as a stumpy girl with a clumsy skull. It's just the most immensely touching, sad piece. It just stuck in my mind, and I said, "If Neanderthals, why not Cro-Magnons, why not dwarves, goblins, because all cultures talk about these creatures?" The other source was the saddest piece in a magazine, from a woman who wrote in and said, "I just want to write about this or I shall go crazy." She'd had three children, I think. Her last child, who was now seven or eight, had been born, she said, a devil. She put it in those terms. She said that this child had never done anything but hate everyone around. She's never done anything normal, like laugh or be happy. She's just destroyed the family, who couldn't stand her. The mother said, "I go in at night and I look at this child asleep. I kiss her while she's asleep because I don't dare kiss her when she's awake." So, anyway, all this went into the story. The main point about this goblin is, he's perfectly viable in himself. He's a normal goblin. But we just cannot cope with him.

INTERVIEWER

Is the space series going to continue?

LESSING

Yes. I haven't forgotten it. If you read the last one, *The Sentimental Agents*—which is really satire, not science fiction—you'll see that I've ended it so that I've pointed it all to the next volume. [The book ends in the middle of a sentence.] In the next book, I send this extremely naive agent off to . . . What's the name of my bad planet?

INTERVIEWER

Shammat?

LESSING

Yes, to Shammat, in order to reform everything. It's going

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to be difficult to write about Shammat because I don't want to make it too like Earth! That's too easy! I have a plot, but it's the tone I need. You know what I mean?

INTERVIEWER

Do you do many public readings of your own work?

LESSING

Not very many. I do when I'm asked. They didn't ask me to in Finland. I don't remember when was the last. Oh, Germany last year, my God! That was the most disastrous trip. It was at some academic institution in Germany. I said to them, "Look, I want to do what I always do. I'll read the story and then I'll take questions." They said, the way they always do, "Oh you can't expect the Germans to ask questions." I said, "Look, just let me handle this, because I know how." Anyway, what happened was typical in Germany: we met at four o'clock in order to discuss the meeting that was going to take place at eight. They cannot stand any ambiguity or disorder—no, no! Can't bear it. I said, "Look, just leave it." The auditorium was very large and I read a story in English and it went down very well, perfectly okay. I said, "I will now take questions." Then this bank of four bloody professors started to put questions to me, these immensely long academic questions of such tedium that finally the audience started to get up and drift out. A young man, a student sprawled on the gangway—as a professor finished something immensely long—called out, "BLAH, BLAH, BLAH, BLAH, BLAH." So with total lack of concern for the professors' feelings I said, "Look, I will take questions in English from the *audience*." So they all came back and sat down, and it went well . . . perfectly lively questions! The professors were absolutely furious. So that was Germany. Germany's the worst, it really is; the end.

INTERVIEWER

Recently, you've turned to writing nonfiction.

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LESSING

Well, I've just written a book, a short book, about the situation in Afghanistan. I was there looking at the refugee camps, because what happens is that men usually go for the newspapers, and men can't speak to the women because of the Islamic attitudes. So we concentrated on the situation with the women. The book's called *The Wind Blows Away Our Words*, which is a quote from one of their writers, who said, "We shout to you for help but the wind blows away our words."

INTERVIEWER

Did you ever worry about what sort of authority you could bring to such an enormous story, being an outsider visiting only for a short time?

LESSING

Do journalists worry about the authority they bring, visiting countries for such a short time? As for me, rather more than most journalists, I was well briefed for the trip, having been studying this question for some years knowing Afghans and Pakistanis (as I made clear in the book) and being with people who knew Farsi—this last benefit not being shared by most journalists.

INTERVIEWER

Your methods of reportage in that book have been the target of some criticism by American journalists, who charge that your trip to Afghanistan was sponsored by a particular pro-Afghan organization. How do you respond to that?

LESSING

This is the stereotypical push-button criticism from the left, from people who I do not think can expect to be taken seriously, for I made it clear in the book that the trip was not organised by a political organization. I went for something called Afghan Relief, set up by some friends, among them myself, which has helped several people to visit Pakistan, but not with money. I paid my own expenses, as did the others I went

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with. The point about Afghan Relief is that it has close links with Afghans, both in exile and fighting inside Afghanistan, and includes Afghans living in London, as advisors. These Afghans are personal friends of mine, not "political." Afghan Relief has so far not spent one penny on administration; all the fund raising work, here and in Pakistan, is done voluntarily. To spell it out: no one has made anything out of Afghan Relief except the Afghans.

INTERVIEWER

From the tag that you used for the Jane Somers book: "If the young knew/If the old could . . . " Do you have any things you would have done differently, or any advice to give?

LESSING

Advice I don't go in for. The thing is, you do not believe . . . I know everything in this field is a cliché, everything's already been said . . . but you just do not believe that you're going to be old. People don't realize how quickly they're going to be old, either. Time goes very fast.

—**Thomas Frick**

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Irving Feldman

Street Scene

Greenwich Village, Summer 1979

Like bulls trotting on their solemn rounds
over the cow flops, daisies, clover,
checking out the maidens of the meadow,
the barnyard's mud-bedappled beauties
—on Friday nights along Bethune
slow black Caddies with Jersey plates
(and lonesome *mafiosi* at the wheel)
cruise the action off the avenue:
mostly, three guys in ladies' rigs
marvelous with fringes, flounces, glitz.
One babe is black and six-foot-three
with fullback shoulders and halfback hips
and the stricken lope of a wide receiver
whose skirt's tackled him around the knees.
The pigskin he fumbles is really a purse
—Pandora's, possibly, and full of tricks.
Up on those spikes he's six-seven, easy.
Pale and faint, crashing, malnourished, broke,
a dark decade of turf patina-ed over
his floral camisole, he looks just pulled
half dying, half dead from an orgy's heap.
(But who's that flitting through the tumbled gangs,
the terrible high pile-ups of all
the fall's leavetakings—is it Bully there
with somebody's life tucked under his arm,
unstoppable Death squirming toward the goal?
Why, that wise guy, that big son of a b.!
Hey, you bum, give the lady back her purse!
Knock him down! Jump on, boys! Bury him deeper!)

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So, say it's a stretch: long like a hearse;
say wet bar, throw in TV, stereo,
figure phone, figure fridge, deluxe this,
plush that, power *everything*—the works!
Well, this randy Caddy wants to sniff.
Four door locks poke up together. Click.
Gleam of gold wig, then white stiletto of
a shoulder strap, a satin dagger of slip
stick the little mobster where he lives.
Car door cracks open. Slams quick. Click. *Vavoom!*
Thunder. Squeal. Odor of Vesuvian dung:
The Underworld burns some rubber—splits.

Beneath the clinging, rumpled number,
the baddest garter belt you ever saw
extends four lacy, fatal pseudopods
and grabs two stockings in small pink jaws.
And where strange nylon becomes plain leg,
a tiny hand on a hairy thigh rides
across bad borders of things forbidden,
over boundaries of race and class,
to Avernus—the hideout of Pluto
(*il capo di tutti capi*) . . . right here
at the foot of black-eyed tenements,
factories of night, boutiques of soot,
between tarred pavements and tarry roofs
. . . just around the corner on Washington.

Under plucked lamptrees, pools of pitchdark.
Lava spurtlets blup from Caddy's chrome pipe.
Then, motor killed, inside the limo
one fat bright roach floats back and forth,
before descending to the ashtray's dust.
Near some cans, some studious shadows browse
on garbage: urban serfs whose whole harvest
is the dump they harrow; city scarabs
doomed to grub for Death with their guts.

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And now
the *thud thud* of hearts bursting in the void:
Bully is sucking up all the air in town
for one climactic blood-curdling bellow
—his come-cry the bad news of an ambu-
lance's dreadful ululation's long approach
with its dark burden of appalling semen
that always always pulls up at your door—
when Bully rips off, rapes (again again)
the shocked bones of gofers, heifers, heroes . . .
hogging for Number One what life there is.

Don't tell me that it doesn't take lots
and lots of spunk—and maybe some speed—
to get yourself into a spot like that
poor, bedraggled person carried off
(by one of P.'s *junior* goons, to be sure,
some minor ruffian, some lesser punk)
to reenact Proserpina's story
—and never having heard it told, not once,
or knowing (yet) the happy ending!

Always a world of earth away
and digging from their male antipodes
with such unlikely implements—and yet
these two guys huddle together over
the strange equipage, the soft, sacred stuffs
—so delicate, and mortal.
Dumb fingers miss a catch, fumble
a button, persist clumsily, touch
thread, investigate the material,
delve the spun silk, velvet, lawn, looking
to release the miracle in the rags:
not this broad or that babe or bimbo, but
The Unspeakable (and still one nearly
stammers it out: *She, Herself, Woman*),
The Unseeable . . . and one wants to look . . .
But the revelation rewards the reverence.

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Against all the odds:
sometime glints (perhaps)
somewhere gleams (maybe)
something glows (almost)
then shines out: She *shows*
—what Death (the boss of all the bosses
and bossies and bullies) had wanted hidden—
haunch and breast, hair, womb, shoulder, children.
The World Is Woman's Self-Celebration!

Car door busts open, out jumps—*wow*—
someone running—golden cornsilk . . . a wig!
in one hand, in the other . . . a wallet!
And runs "not as one who loses" but as
the only guy who'll score tonight.
Bang. There he goes! *Bang*. On the double
two bullets take off after the pullet
who lets the wig fall . . . lifts up the skirt,
whizzing zigging head down in a hurry,
streaking for dear life through the broken field.

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Lynne McMahon

Dog Days

It's the willed trick of concentration
that makes of these heat-heavy
bogged declivities—the graves of
boulders we've levered up
to line the footpath to the house—
snow-angels,
and of the sweat, sluicing down
into the wristbands
of our canvas gloves, run-off
from the glacial peaks
that once surrounded
the bowl of the prairie.
It's the pioneer trick cowboys
use, and construction
workers and roadcrews, and old
as weather, though it's given
hip status now, and called
"visualizing" or "image
therapy," a kind of negative capability:
the mirage is really a glimpse
of the real world, but telescoped
so it seems we never arrive
there. Mirage pulled the wagon-
trains toward the horizon
and tugged babies from the darkness.

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All the tired souls sucked
into the afterlife were unlashed
from the travois and lifted up
by its shimmer.
This is still a visionary place,
though the air-conditioner buzzes
and drips inside the window sill
and obscures the sheen
of what's there before us.
It takes outside work, I guess, and
a density of watered air
and mosquitoes to feel in this plain,
before this house was on it,
the itch for a new west.

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Two Poems by Thom Gunn

Sacred Heart

For one who watches with too little rest
A body rousing fitfully to its pain
—The nerves like dull burns where the sheet has pressed—
Subsiding to dementia yet again;
For one who snatches what repose he can,
Exhausted by the fretful reflexes
Jerked from the torpor of a dying man,
Sleep is a fear, invaded as it is
By coil on coil of ominous narrative
In which specific isolated streaks,
Bright as tattoos, of inks that seem to live,
Shift through elusive patterns. Once in those weeks
You dreamt your dying friend hung crucified
In his front room, against the mantelpiece;
Yet it was Christmas, when you went outside
The shoppers bustled, bells rang without cease,
You smelt a sharp excitement on the air,
Crude itch of evergreen. But you returned
To find him still nailed up, mute sufferer
Lost in a trance of pain, toward whom you yearned.
When you woke up, you could not reconcile
The two conflicting scenes, indoors and out.
But it was Christmas. And parochial school
Accounted for the Dying God no doubt.

Now since his death you've lost the wish for sleep,
In which you might mislay the wound of feeling:
Drugged you drag grief from room to room and weep,
Preserving it from closure, from a healing
Into the novelty of glazed pink flesh.
We hear you stumble vision-ward above,
Keeping the edges open, bloody, fresh.

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Wound, no—the heart, His Heart, broken with love.

An unfamiliar ticking makes you look
Down your left side where, suddenly apparent
Like a bright plate from an anatomy book
—In its snug housing, under the transparent
Planes of swept muscle and the barrelled bone—
The heart glows, and you feel the holy heat:
The heart of hearts transplanted to your own
Losing rich purple drops with every beat.
Yet even as it does your vision alters,
The hallucination lighted through the skin
Begins to deaden (though still bleeding), falters,
And hardens to its evident origin
—A red heart from a cheap religious card,
Too smooth, too glossy, too securely cased!

Stopped in a crouch, you wearily regard
Each drop dilute into the waiting waste.

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Words For Some Ash

Poor parched man, we had to squeeze
Dental sponge against your teeth,
So that moisture by degrees
Dribbled to the mouth beneath.

Christmas Day your pupils crossed,
Staring at your nose's tip,
Seeking there the air you lost
Yet still gaped for, dry of lip.

Now you are a bag of ash
Scattered on a coastal ridge,
Where you watched the distant crash,
Ocean on a broken edge.

Death has wiped away each sense;
Fire took muscle, bone, and brains;
Next may rain leach discontents
From your dust, wash what remains

Deeper into damper ground
Till the granules work their way
Down to unseen streams, and bound
Briskly in the water's play;

May you lastly reach the shore,
Joining tide without intent,
Only worried any more
By the currents' argument.

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Daniel Mark Epstein

The Rivals

Happiness, in the fairy tale, comes hobbling
disguised as a hag. And the prince takes pity
on her, bringing her to bed, not knowing this

is happiness, thinking this is just a hag who
for some moral he values beyond comprehension
has made this trial of his magnanimity,

and no sooner does he embrace her than she
becomes an exquisite young maiden
with no past and no future apart from his.

So a man I thought my enemy came to haunt me,
featureless at first, in the dusk of dreams,
then turning slowly toward the daylight

until at last, in profile, I recognized
my old rival. He will have his revenge,
I thought, sending that face, more hideous

than anything of nature's cruel devising,
to flame up in a wall of sleepless rage
between me and all that I must see to do.

And my God, I thought, this is like love
who taught me her lesson years ago, though
she was beautiful and this is a death's head.

My enemy came to haunt me, tirelessly
until, desperate, I kissed him, kissed him
dead. Then he slept, long and beautifully.

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Two Poems by Cynthia Nadelman

Men Without Women

You must change your life, Mademoiselle
from Armentières, while the days are in your favor.
You have other battles,
other chores.
That's all I wanted to say,
though I was thinking,
Maybe you could take or leave this.
And thinking of saying it,
if it didn't sound too stupid,
too superfluous,
too offputting.
But which of us is the mademoiselle?

Some dancers, male and female,
tell a soldier's tale:
they're there.
Tell it to them,
tell it through them.
Their pain is the measure
no bell goes off
to signify. In between,
no cheaply acquired ecstasies.
They take their aches, hard slams,
gravity, parlay them into
something they can't see—
turn rickety thickets to
glades of chance,
a way of living.
In the audience sits one
who, watching, wonders

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if she regrets, if she should mourn
the loss of what she once had
before she was a sensualist,
if what feels good can be undone.

Mademoiselle, soldat,
so good at marching, dancing
in the other's absence, if
you should live to grow old,
which of you will tell,
and whose story will it be?

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Another Flawed Philosopher

Early on brighter days, when the
view from the couch
is the most blinding
because the sun above this
building hits the taller one
next door and caroms back,
there will be, first glimpsed
sidewise, a movement,
a specifically circumscribed shadow.
Then it ducks or something, because
it's not there, all is still.
When it comes back, recaptured,
usually multiplied and cooing,
it remains—at least long enough
to establish a coming into view.
Strutting along a length of
the roof's hard geometry,
stenciled thus by the light
translated to the neighboring wall,
a pigeon or several are
as clear as day.

It's a wonder
their feet don't make a racket
above. Instead, they just
glide across the way, sometimes
lower, their heads bending,
bodies different sizes, sometimes
lower because of the time of year.
More of a promontory than Plato's.
If this phenomenon were
marketed, would we
have a republic, or, at best,
an idea?

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The horrendous infantile
shrieks and caterwaulings
of our dirty existential alleycat
could start another philosopher
on a lifelong project and probably have.
More and more, this formerly unseen and
reclusive denizen has been out
on the sidewalk casting squinty looks
before skulking back to the brutal
backyards of these several buildings,
where objects fall from windows in the night.
No one seems to notice how the frayed and
smudged animal stares me down every time
I try to follow where exactly it is that it goes.

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João Cabral de Melo Neto

The Word Silk

The atmosphere surrounding you
reaches heights in which
it changes things
concerning you or near you.

And as well as things, words
impossible in poems:
for example, the word gold
and, until this poem, silk.

True, your person arouses
rather than inducing sleep;
nor is it a sedative, a word
derived from the word for silk.

And it's true that the surface
of your external person,
of your skin and of all
that gropes inside you,

has nothing of the pompous,
false, academic surface
—that surface designated
by the phrase "like silk."

But in you, somewhere,
perhaps outside of you,
perhaps in the mood
your presence excites,

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there's something muscular,
animal, carnal, pantherish,
catlike—catlike in substance
or in a cat's way of being—

something animal, animalistic,
crude, cruel—a cruelty—which
beneath the worn-out word
persists in the thing silk.

—translated from the Portuguese
by Richard Zenith

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Three Poems by Hugh Seidman

A Day

Uptown for freelance techwriting,
then home. The mouse hole at
the stove needs plugging. But first,
the bills, the post-card Florida
palm, the contest's prize Datsun.
And on the Phone-Mate: J. and PEN.
Finally, he hammers the nails
to steel wool—till *General Hospital*:
what he and L. watched that summer
he wrote full time (forgot then as time),
lost, except here. Still,
it's hard to stay tuned. And he tells
PEN no to a panel on the murdered
Aquino, whom he hasn't read.
And J. calls again, though at first,
like a dream, he can't place her.

And later he walks: a woman in fur,
in SoHo, with diamond ear studs
stands in Rizzoli, as if from the photos
he holds. One marvelous one:
a blond with a blond child, in white
and helmets, with naked, painted natives.
And upstairs: rock stars, dictators,
complexly drawn women in armor,
the dead, the poor, and so and so—
till one might beg the judged world
to be the judged. And south, the World
Trade towers glow, like dull
ice blocks in the blue-black
Eighties dark. And they are as that:
anonymous, unpardoned, victorious,
erupted fuses of the plus minus.

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E Train—8:32 AM

The old Chinese stands and sleeps,
and sways with the swaying car,
like the stem of a plant underwater,
and the leaf of his face breaking the water.

And the fat woman in red sleeps,
because red is the color of sleep.
And the Hispanic girl closes her eyelids,
like clouds on the moon and sun.

And the black messenger sleeps,
his bird's head on his chest.
And the blond with her child sleeps,
sitting up as we bore through the dark.

For now labor must be done
by the poor from the planets of sleep,
from the dust blown over the statues
to the hard terrains and facades.

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The Null Geodesics

Do you know these? They are the paths of the star light in our universe. As all know, the Physicist showed that the sun, that star, curves light. He tried until death to merge gravity and light. He believed God does not toss dice.

But I throw the coins, half dollars with the obverse eagle, to their six spectral lines, as if you were an order or could be consigned, as light is, to a principle. Even as sometimes the dark is touched, beyond which the dark seems inexhaustible, as a black hole is said to trap light.

Thus, a woman under the stars might have been you. They have shone so long—one would think they would tire but they do not, like the mind that does not, which thinks of you. And a life is lived as out of nothing, as if matter had conjoined to its negative to free great heat.

But what would the Physicist have felt, had he merged the fields? I dial your number, like a conjecture unsolved for centuries. I force the electrons to choose. And I think of the geodesics: tracking in almost infinite history, arcing in a gravity that defines geometry, as it is said that space-time curves.

And I think of you like light, as if thought were gravity, though new assumption, new notation obsolete us with new analogy. As even now, each word, like a star, may change or halt us, may force us to re-calculate ourselves.

And when your voice comes I see the stars: how they live, evolve, and die; how sometimes they seem to swell in magnitude; how there, it is proposed, other life rises and falls, which knows nothing of you—though perhaps it too is listening, trying to sense whatever might be left of you.

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Portfolio

Portraits

Mike and Doug Starn

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Mark Morrisroe

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Portrait of M. with Slate

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Ivan

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Lisa

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Dark Portrait

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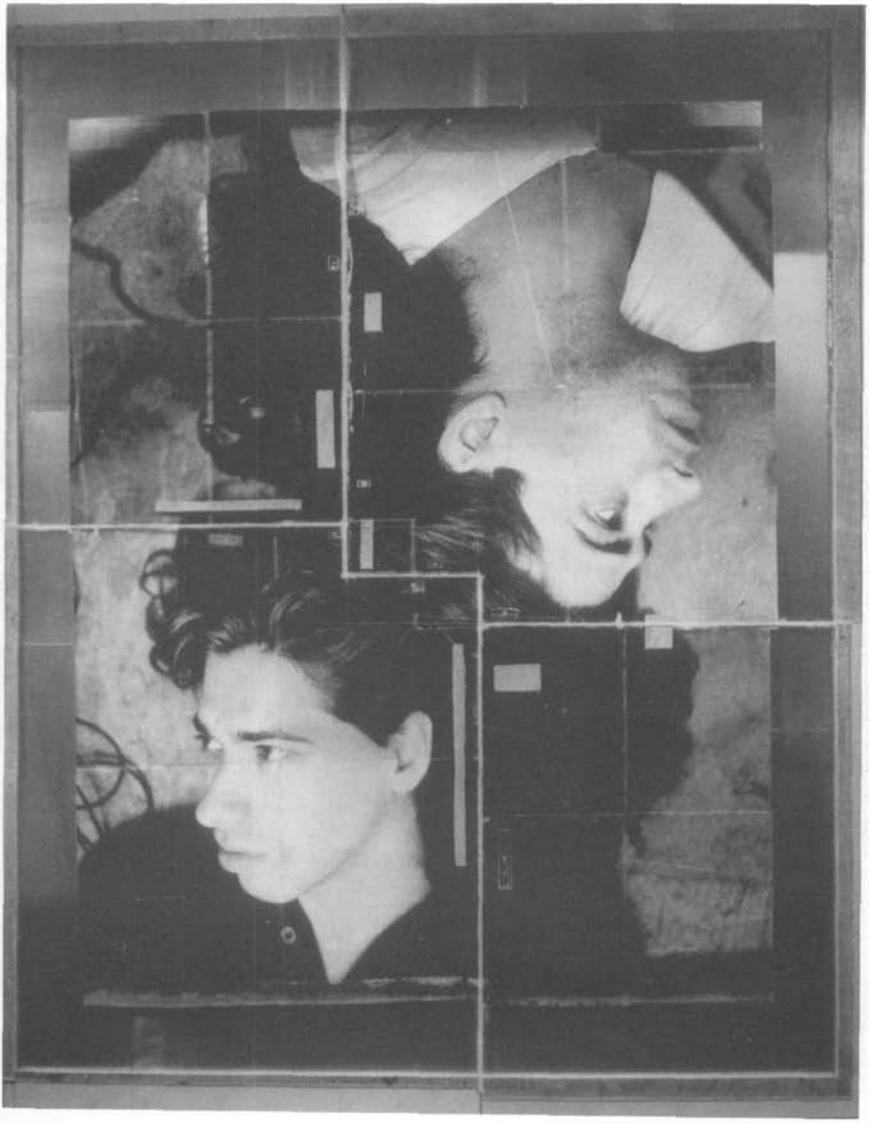

Self Portrait

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The Stark Portrait

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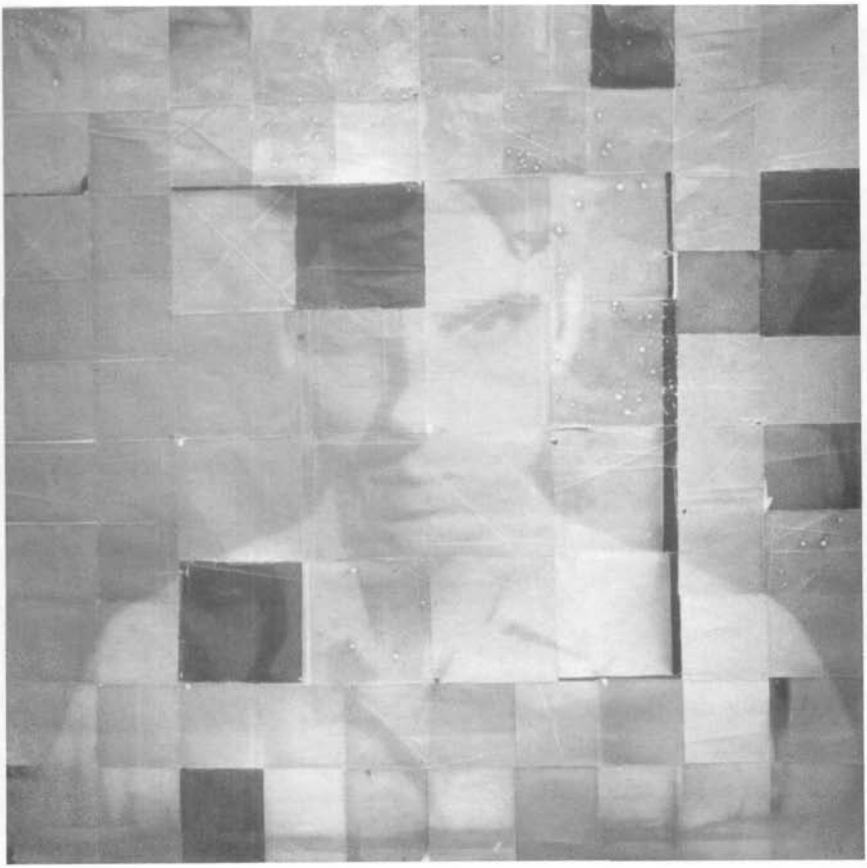

Ian

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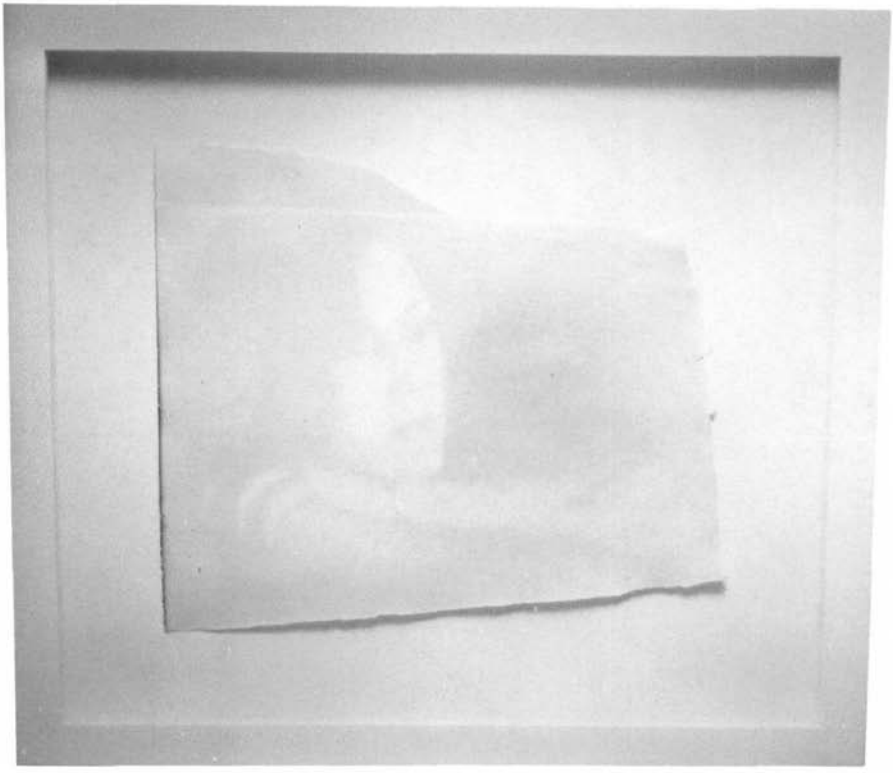

White Marcie

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Blue Lisa

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The Prophet Elijah

Ernst Havemann

Everyone in Upper Parkview, even people who did not know the Engelbrechts socially, knew about their Elijah, and how he not only cooked and served at the Engelbrechts' excellent parties, but also suggested the dates and chose the wine. It was said he kept a record of who owed the Engelbrechts and whom they owed, and that people who offended him got shifted down the list. He carefully read the Domestic Intelligence columns of the Johannesburg Star every day in case an item should prove relevant, and indeed would not recognize that a birth, death or marriage had actually occurred if he did not see it in the paper.

His faith in the written word was what had originally got him the Engelbrecht job. Mrs. Engelbrecht had advertised *Wanted—clean honest native cook/houseboy*. Elijah, then nineteen, had presented himself: a tall young man with a trusting, monkey-like face and a sparse beard.

"Can you cook?" Mrs. Engelbrecht had asked.

"Yes, Madam," Elijah replied.

"Where did you learn?"

"I have not learned. But I can read." He held out a school

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certificate. "If Madam gives me a cooking book I will make like it says."

The other, more experienced natives who applied looked scruffy or had work permit problems or ambiguous references—"works well under supervision," "I believe him to be honest"—so Mrs. Engelbrecht had taken Elijah at his word, engaged him on trial and given him *Home Cooking for the Young Housewife.* There was a fund of amusing stories about his early days: he threw away the soup and kept the soupbone; reported in consternation that the jam marked caviar stank of fish; put a rand note instead of a silver coin in the Christmas pudding; and so on. Mrs. Engelbrecht's favorite anecdote was of being held up in a traffic jam for four hours before an important dinner party. Arriving home only twenty minutes before her guests were due, she found the meal ready, and exactly as she had intended. Elijah had explained: "I thought Madam will say, 'We'll have the leg of mutton, Elijah' and she will say, 'It will be nice with rosemary, that will be a change from mint-sauce.' And Madam will say, 'It's a heavy meal, so we'll need a cool dessert, that's why I bought those pawpaws and grenadillas. You can put in a few slices of grapefruit, too, Elijah.' And Madam will say, 'Now mind you don't use the bitter kind like you did that other time, eh, Elijah.'"

These stories belonged to a time many years ago when Nicola was two, and Elijah had babysat her in addition to his other duties, putting a box under her highchair so that she could watch what he was doing. The first words she learned to read were recipes. Elijah used to prop a cookery book in front of her, and they said the words and performed the actions together, producing "treats" to give Mr. Engelbrecht when he arrived home from work.

Nicola ordered Elijah about like a slave—"Bring me my milk, Elijah," "Pick up my book, Elijah"—and he always stopped whatever he was doing and did as she ordered. In return she had given him her discarded toys. When she learned to sew she made him colored handkerchiefs and scarves and big gaudy pieces of costume jewelry. He wore them uncomplainingly, startling the Engelbrechts' guests by appearing

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with a necklace of plum-sized red beads or with a cravat like a tropic sunburst enlivening his waiter's suit.

My parents lived next door to the Engelbrechts for as long as I could remember, so I grew up with Nicola on a brother-and-sister basis, and shared her pride in Elijah. When I was fourteen or fifteen I was much the same size as he was, and used to pass my cast-off clothes on to him. One of the jokes of the neighborhood was the sight of Elijah during his free time—what he called his *ama-offi*—strolling down the road looking just like me, only black. It was also one of his jokes. When he had a black visitor he would break off their Zulu conversation to say in English, loud enough for me to hear, "See, he is just my size. He is breaking in that coat till it is comfortable for me." At other times he would warn me: "Be careful of those clothes. I don't want grease spots on my gray flannels."

His *ama-offi* were two afternoons a week and the whole of every second Sunday. On these Sundays he set off very early, in smart conventional clothes, carrying a small suitcase. From seeing him wash and iron them we suspected the suitcase contained the blue and white and gold vestments of the Black Zion sect—the *Ama Zion*—which we had read about in a recent magazine article. One Sunday we followed him, using another student's car so that he would not notice us, and brought binoculars. Elijah took a bus, got off some distance before the native township and walked away from the road to a clump of trees. He disappeared for a while, then re-emerged clad in pale blue robes, a gold surplice and a gold and white hat. He stood chanting in Zulu, very loudly. During the next half hour dozens of black women appeared from the roadside, from clumps of trees on the veld, and from paths winding between the hillocks. All wore white skirts and blue tops. Men in blue shirts joined them. They made a circle round Elijah, chanting and swaying, and he moved about the group, patting each one's head. We never mentioned seeing his ceremony, feeling that we had in some way been intruding on a private thing, just as we never expected to set foot in his room, though we spent hours in the adjoining playroom.

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On his weekday *ama-offi* he occasionally joined us in the playroom to listen to records or to help us mend our bikes or whatever we were doing. Sometimes he told us Bible stories, relating them as though they were factual events that had recently occurred and that he had heard from an acquaintance or read in *The Bantu World* or *The Star*. He gave the characters typical South African names: "Sergeant Golly Goliath van Rensburg stood up, he was seven foot six, and he had a sjambok as thick as a child's leg. He stood up in the armored car and shouted, 'Hey, you bloody black bastards, who thinks he can fight me, eh? Come on, I'll take on any of your heavyweights.' And there was a small boy, Davidi Mhlongo, the son of Kal'impi. He came from Kwa Zulu. He had been herding his father's six cows. He had a slingshot made of the fork of a small thorn bush, and from strips of red rubber from the inner tube of a Ford truck. And Davidi, the son of Kal'impi, put his palm flat on the ground, feeling for a pebble. He did not find one but he felt another kind of heavy thing. It was a six-sided steel nut from the wheel of a car. And Davidi ka Kal'impi Mhlongo fitted the wheel-nut into his slingshot and he pulled back the rubber and he said, 'Great great one, guide the iron pebble you sent.' Then he let go. And the wheel-nut went vurr vurr vurr through the air and it hit Sergeant Golly van Rensburg in the middle of his forehead and sank in, and Sergeant Golly fell off the armored car, and he did not move."

I once teased Elijah about his blue robes and asked him to model them for us. He said curtly, "God thing no for play. Him Ama Zion," using the pidgin English he affected with people he did not like or when he wanted to play stupid.

He did his stupid-native act when a white police constable came making inquiries about a neighbor's servant suspected of a burglary.

"What man?" Elijah said. "How she look? Captain got picture?" He mimed a camera as if the policeman would otherwise not know how a picture is made. "How I can to know what man if Captain not tell how she look?"

"I told you his name," Constable Brownlee said, apparently

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irritated by being called Captain. "He worked for Mr. Matthews at Number 721."

"Matthews' house sunup," Elijah said, frowning and pointing. "Town he sundown."

"What the hell has that got to do with it?" Constable Brownlee said.

"Sometimes I see much man by Matthews. Some she fat, some she long. Which one Sergeant want?"

The constable said curtly, "That's all," but Elijah had not finished. Enjoying our barely restrained smiles he went on, "How Sergeant can find man you don't know how she look? All black kaffir look same for Sergeant?"

Constable Brownlee obviously did not know how to cope in front of us with Elijah's jokes at his methods or his rank, but he did have a retaliatory response available. He put his face close to Elijah's and sniffed, presumably for pot. Apparently finding none he said respectfully to Mrs. Engelbrecht, "Just to be on the safe side, could I have a look in your cook's room?"

"Of course," she said, and told Elijah.

I had never before seen anyone go pale. Elijah went a sort of powder gray, like old carbon paper, and stumbled before he recovered himself. "No, Madam! Not my room! My room my private place. I keep my God things." He edged toward the basement door as if to bar entry. "Does Madam think I stole Mr. Matthews' silver?" he demanded, reverting in his agitation to his normal fluent and correct English.

"Of course not, Elijah. We would never think such a thing. It's just to satisfy the policeman," Mrs. Engelbrecht said helplessly. "He has to do his job. Surely you understand?"

The policeman brushed past Elijah, I followed him.

"This his quarters?" I nodded. The policeman tried the door and pushed it open. "You come in with me, young man. I'd like a witness, just in case. Come on, Bantu," he beckoned to Elijah. "It's your room. You're entitled to be present during the search. Then you can see I'm not planting any stolen goods on you, eh." He pulled Elijah into the room. "Besides, I want you where I can see you."

It was a spacious room formed by the footings of the Engel-

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brechts' living room. The walls were of unplastered brick, limewashed a pale blue. On the wall directly opposite the door was a burlap curtain, like a wall-hanging. The constable pulled it aside to reveal a large embroidered cross and star of shiny gold material, at the base of which were Elijah's blue and white robes, a black bible, and an embroidered hassock with two dents showing how much it had been knelt on. The constable lifted the cross, tapped the wall behind it, shook the Bible and moved to the wardrobe standing against the next wall. He took out, felt and shook each jacket and pair of trousers before dropping it carefully on the floor. He did not drop Elijah's kitchen and waiter's suits on the floor (because he knew they belonged to the Engelbrechts, I wondered), and was perfunctory about shaking out the blankets on the bed, but paused for some moments over the large photograph in a neat frame on the bedside table. It was of the Engelbrecht family, with glasses in their hands, toasting Elijah. All, including Elijah, wore paper hats; Mr. Engelbrecht in addition wore Elijah's chef's cap. Constable Brownlee shook his head and proceeded to the last item in the room. It was a large alcove formed by the meeting of two brickwork arches; spread across it was a sacking curtain like the one covering the cross. Elijah stood with his back against it.

"Stand aside," Constable Brownlee said impatiently.

"You have seen the room. There is nothing here," Elijah said, spreading his arms across the curtain.

"Stand aside, Bantu. I must look behind that sacking."

"It is private!" Elijah screamed. "It is a religious place."

For a moment it looked as if he might attack the constable, but he offered no resistance when Brownlee reached past him and pulled the curtain aside. Behind it, pinned on to a dazzling white sheet of heavy silky cloth, was a mass of color—pink, red, black, yellow handkerchiefs, scarves, headbands and sashes; shining glass, metal and plastic jewelry; Christmas and birthday cards. They formed a great blossoming surround to a niche full of photographs of Nicola. There she was, a naked baby on her stomach; a little girl in a party dress; in gym costume and school tie; in a bikini; and, in the center, a big

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picture of her at her last birthday, looking absolutely terrific beside a great cake, under which she had written, "For dear Elijah." At the base of the shrine, for that is what it clearly was, sat a teddy bear, a very ragged golden-haired doll, a red fire engine and number of other toys. I recognized most of them as ones that Nicola had given Elijah when she was a child. In front of them lay another hassock, also with two knee dents.

"What the hell goes on here?" Constable Brownlee demanded, but Elijah had already slipped out. Brownlee poked gingerly at the white silken back-drop and peered cautiously behind a big scarf. "Looks like voodoo," he said. "Could be an offense under the witchcraft law, but there doesn't seem to be any of Matthews' silver here." He went to the kitchen door to tell Mrs. Engelbrecht that he had found no stolen property in Elijah's room. "But you've got a twisted Bantu there, you know." He tapped his temple. "You should be careful."

I went back to commiserate with Elijah but he had gone. He was walking very fast, way down the street, gesticulating as if talking to himself.

Mr. Engelbrecht arrived home shortly afterwards. I stayed for drinks and recounted what had happened in Elijah's room, exaggerating Constable Brownlee's accent and miming Elijah with outstretched arms standing guard over the shrine.

Nicola was charmed by my description of it, "Oh, the dear, lovely man! Has he still got the red woolen hat I gave him when the puppy chewed it? And the Red Indian headband with the blue feathers?"

"Yes," I said. "And that nauseating pink and black shirt you brought back from Mauritius. And the golliwog you stole from me."

She clapped her hands in delight. "What can I give him to make it richer and kitschier? Something in lurex, or purple, like a bishop's vest?"

We became aware that her parents were not sharing our amusement.

"I want you both to agree never, ever to say anything to anyone else about this, this, fetish temple," Mr. Engelbrecht said.

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"It could give rise to very nasty talk. I'm not sure I'm too happy about it myself."

"But isn't it romantic?" I put in. "Like She or Tarzan. 'Jungle Africans revere white goddess.'"

"It's fine in a book. It's not the same when it's real. Think about it for a moment, and you'll see."

I could indeed see. A flesh-and-blood black man maintaining a shrine for a sexy teenage white girl in Johannesburg was not the same as Rider Haggard or Tarzan. The picture of the nude toddler, and the fact that the shrine was in the black man's room, in the basement of the girl's home, somehow made it worse.

"I'll offer him a job in the factory canteen," Mr. Engelbrecht said. He was obviously thinking how to explain to friends why the Engelbrechts were giving up a household paragon like Elijah. "We pay him pretty well here, but the factory wage is better, and he'll be able to join the pension scheme. I'll arrange for his service to be back-dated."

"I'll miss him," Mrs. Engelbrecht sighed. "It's been sixteen years. Since Nicola was a toddler. Sixteen years! And never a teaspoon short or a sulky face. But we can't keep him now. Even the policeman thought he was a bit sick."

"You're making it horrid," Nicola wept. "It was beautiful, and you're making it slimy and horrid." Nevertheless, she did not protest further. She went to the sideboard and poured herself a large whiskey. She usually drank ginger ale, or at most, beer shandy. Mr. Engelbrecht's eyes widened, but he did not comment. We all sat silent, watching her gulp and choke and add water and gulp again. "He taught me to spell tablespoon *t b s p*," she said, "because that's how it is in recipe books."

"I'll have a word with him in the morning," Mr. Engelbrecht said.

Elijah did not bring in their six o'clock tea next morning. Mr. Engelbrecht went to look in his room, making sure to knock hard beforehand and to wait a few moments before going inside. The bedclothes were on the floor, roughly folded,

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and the mattress lay diagonally over the bed frame, making it clear no one had slept there that night.

The Engelbrechts made their own breakfast, anxiously discussing what might have happened, and defending themselves against their own unvoiced accusations of injustice. They were still at breakfast when a hospital telephoned. A black accident victim had been brought in. He was dead on arrival, having apparently walked right across the path of a heavy truck. Papers on him showed him to be Elijah Mpanza, employed by Mr. T. Engelbrecht, Upper Parkview.

Mr. Engelbrecht said he would come and identify the body and that he would be responsible for funeral expenses. Nicola thought he sounded almost relieved because now he would not have to tell Elijah that he was no longer welcome. He left Mrs. Engelbrecht to go through Elijah's room for clues as to next of kin, though they did not expect to find any. Elijah had always said he had no family, and he never even took the paid holidays they offered him every year.

Mrs. Engelbrecht did not feel she could go through his room alone, let alone involve Nicola. She phoned me to come over, and we went in together. The room was just as it had been when Constable Brownlee and I left. Mrs. Engelbrecht absentmindedly picked clothes off the floor and straightened them before hanging them in the wardrobe or stacking them on the shelves, and we jointly straightened the mattress. I pulled aside the burlap to show the Black Zion cross and star, and Elijah's Bible, and then went to do the same to the other curtain, but Mrs. Engelbrecht shivered and put her hands over her eyes.

We found no letters or other clues as to next of kin, but a leaflet in the Bible gave the address and telephone number of the Black Zion Head Prophet. He and his people took over as soon as Mrs. Engelbrecht phoned. They volubly thanked the Engelbrechts for bearing the funeral costs, and dealt in a down-to-earth way with types and prices of coffins, hearses, and burial plots.

The township administrator would not allow whites to attend a black man's funeral. He knew the Engelbrechts meant

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well, but it might look political, he said: did Mr. Engelbrecht know the deceased was an Ama Zion, and that Ama Zions preached that the black township, Soweto, would be the venue of the Second Coming?

To make up for not being able to go to the burial, the Engelbrechts arranged for a memorial service at Upper Parkview Community Hall. Forty or fifty domestic servants from the neighborhood attended, many in blue and white, together with a busload of Black Zion prophets and prophetesses in robes and yellow surplices, and a number of the Engelbrechts' white friends.

The black mourners could hardly believe that the spread of cold meats, sandwiches, tea, cakes and beer was for them. When they were at last persuaded, the occasion quickly warmed up. A contralto prophetess, obviously accustomed to being a lead singer, sang out, "Oh Zion, Zion in Soweto, fetch your prophet home."

Others joined in with, "Zion in Soweto, Africa is Zion, Zion, Zion," turning it into a complex round. The whites soon got the hang of it, and it was not long before the hall was resounding. Mr. Engelbrecht's stockbroker, who ran our Gilbert and Sullivan Club, and the Black Zion contralto did harmonizing improvisations on each other's themes, while the rest of us stamped our feet softly and murmured, "Africa is Zion, Zion, Zion," to provide a sussurating background. Every minute or two someone would shout "Elijah!" whereupon we all thumped the floor harder and shouted "Elijah!" Mrs. Engelbrecht stood off to one side sobbing quietly and being comforted by a very fat Black Zion lady. The Upper Parkview mourners agreed that the party was quite up to the standard Elijah would have set if he had been in charge. It broke up only when the bus had to leave, taking the Ama Zions back to the township.

Nicola took no part in the discussions about Elijah's affairs or the funeral, and did not attend the memorial service. When I called to tell her about it she impatiently cut short my description of the singing and asked me to take her to "my shrine." She looked for a long time at the jumble of color, and

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fingered the yellow-haired doll and a pink scarf. "I wonder if he called me Saint Nicola?" she said. "It's just like a niche in a cathedral, isn't it? It would have been nice with light coming from behind, like stained glass." She went to the kitchen and fetched a large green garbage bag, then took down the shrine decorations and pictures one by one and put them gently into the bag, pushing them down to fit. I offered to help: she refused, but let me carry the filled bag to the area behind the tennis court where there was an outdoor incinerator that we used to use for burning the Guy on Guy Fawkes' Days. I fetched a can of used oil from the garage and we poked and lifted the pile while it burned to make sure nothing was left: even so, I finally had to dig a hole to bury bits of metal and fire-resistant toys. When I patted the soil back Nicola squeezed my hand and ran clumsily up to the house.

She left home soon afterwards to share a flat with another student. Her parents are very distressed because she smokes pot and is mixed up in funny religious and political movements. I don't see much of them now, but everyone in Upper Parkview, even people who don't know them socially, knows about the Engelbrechts' Amalia, who cooks superbly, and who cut quite a dash by appearing one evening in one of Elijah's waiter suits, which she had altered herself. Until then no one in Upper Parkview had a black maid who served dinner in a white trouser suit and frilly pink blouse.

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Ten Poems by James Laughlin

"The meanings in language are not original, anymore than the sounds; they accrue from all the generations of human use."
—Robert Duncan

The Heretic

My theory that the people on both sides
of the mountain range were Brabers is a-

rousing violent controversy and censure
the old traditions say there were Brabers

in the Klung Valley and Mends in the Tam-
lin Riff but I have been making tracings

of the ancient glyphs in the caves as I
study them I hear voices in the signs

I'm convinced that they were the same peo-
ple on both sides of the mountains they

were all Brabers it is rumored that my
book may be brought before the Trilegium

it could go hard with me but I must suf-
fer it I know what I know what it has

been given me to know to tell the people.

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An Anginal Equivalent

For those little stabs of pain
in the region of the heart the

poet is having an EKG the wires
are attached to a small TV and

as he lies there he can watch
the bouncing beat on the screen

qualim asks Martial velim quae-
ris nolimve puellam? nolo nimis

facilem difficilemque nimis what
does that jerking line tell him

about the prospect for his new
affection illud quod medium est

atque inter utrumque probamus
nec volo quod cruciat nec volo

quod satiat which will she be?

You ask what kinds of girl I like
and don't like
Let her not be a pushover, yet not
too hard to get
Somewhere between the two
Not one who tears me to pieces
But not one who hangs on my neck.

—Martial, I, lvii

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Prolepsis

> *"You are a future, my poor darling,*
> *that pretends to be a past but will*
> *never be a present."*
>
> —from Stendhal's *Lucien Leuwen*

I always feared that things
would end badly between us

but never imagined how you
would humiliate me at a mo-

ment when my passion for you
was at its peak
One of your
attractions (if I can call

it that) was your temper if
you were bored or displeas-

ed how your eyes flashed
how your language whipped

my skin
In the bedroom of
the hotel in Luzern after

you had had your bath you
paraded before the mirrors

with only a towel wrapped
around your head as if it

were a turban in a harem.

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A Shard of History

Could it be that I am the one
who is the false Dmitri the

unknown whose nocturnal crimes
have terrified the city of Nov-

gorod what do I do when I am
sleeping am I a murderous

sleepwalker who remembers no-
thing the next day is it only

my imagination that passersby
turn their heads and hurry past

me are they whispering about
me in the cafés although I

have no proof of what I fear
no blood on my hands or cloth-

ing should I give myself up
to the police probably they

would only laugh at me they
would take me for a madman

seeking notoriety they would
put me for a few days in the

asylum for observation then
let me go I would be free to

prowl again if that is what
I do no if I am indeed the

false Dmitri my crimes de-
serve the final punishment.

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The Limper

Rilke writes of the expectation
that a beloved is about to ap-

pear but in what form will she
come as a living person or an

apparition and how will we re-
cognize each other what sign

will there be that she is the
chosen one in my case I hope

she has been warned about my
limp no one can fail to no-

tice it my limp is well known
throughout the city they call

me the limper some think my
limp is good luck and some

bad I know people talk about
it she will know me by my

limp and will speak to me.

> *"Warst du nicht immer*
> *noch von Erwartung zerstreut, als kündigte alles*
> *eine Geliebte dir an?"*
>
> —Duineser Elegien, *I, 31–33*

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The Kiss

In the films when the couples kiss
they grind their lips together as

if to prove their passion by break-
ing their teeth but your kiss was

barely a passing touch as delicate
as the breath of Zephyrus I hardly

knew it had come before it was gone.

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The Ritual

The ritual of the poem in praise of you
demands the vision of a goddess an ap-

parition an evocation the goddess may
be the Cytherean born of the seafoam

she of dark eyelids venerandam or she
of the moon & the grove her nymphs ga-

thered about her choros nympharum ven-
erandam or she who sprang from the head

of her father blue-eyed glaukopis mo-
ther of cities venerandam there are

other goddesses in the Hymni Deorum who
are of great beauty and clairvoyance but

I cannot choose for you among them you
alone can reveal to me your hidden name.

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Her Letters

Did he imagine that her letters
were written to him those ones

which described in such detail
the topography of her heart (tho

always in phrases whose chaleur
did not exceed what was permis-

sible to a lady of breeding and
discretion) didn't he know she

was writing to someone who did
not exist or at least no longer

existed for her because she was
tired of him oh so bored with

him but didn't know how to break
off and so he had become a phan-

tom it being her disposition to
write to a lover alive or dead.

> *"Elle n'en continuait pas moins à lui écrire des lettres amoureuses, en vertu de cette idée qu'une femme doit toujours écrire à son amant.*
>
> *Mais, en écrivant, elle percevait un autre homme, un fantôme fait de ses plûs ardents souvenirs . . . "*
>
> —*Emma's letters to Léon,* Madame Bovary

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The Sorrows of Smindyrides

He is a delicate flower indeed
talk of the princess and the pea

Aelianus recounts that the syba-
rite Smindyrides spent a sleep-

less night because one of the
rose petals strewn on his bed

was folded in two (his slave
the unfortunate folder of pe-

tals was severely beaten) my
friend delights in pulverizing

reputations but if he is criti-
cized for misplacing a comma his

dinner is gall in his mouth and
his wine too bitter to swallow.

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News from Planet Earth

big	long	hard
bright	loud	hot
burn	light	hole
still	wide	red
soft	wet	round
sand	word	road
dark	cold	torn
deaf	cone	taped
door	cape	tree
better	breathing	wakened
tender	having	turned
cover	holding	cried
dreamer	hearing	pleased

no more no more no more no more no more

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William Carlos Williams

Correspondence with His Publisher (1937–62)

The correspondence between James Laughlin and William Carlos Williams began late in 1933 at the instigation of their mutual friend, Ezra Pound. At the age of nineteen, Laughlin had met Pound in Rapallo, Italy, where he spent several months on a leave of absence from Harvard at Pound's "Ezuversity," a sort of informal seminar conducted by the poet. Suggesting that Laughlin would best serve literature by becoming a publisher, Pound put him in touch with many in his extensive network of literary contacts, including his friend William Carlos Williams.

Laughlin first wrote Williams in December, 1933. After a month the doctor replied, misspelling (which he did persistently) Laughlin's surname as Loughlin. Upon his return to Harvard, Laughlin persuaded Williams to publish in the college literary magazine, The Harvard Advocate. *When New Directions was founded in 1936 in Norfolk, Connecticut, on the estate of a supportive aunt, Mrs. Leila Carlisle, Laughlin's publishing strategy was to build his list on a foundation of work by Pound (who referred to New Directions as Nude Erections) and Williams, adding new authors and poets as they came on the literary scene. Williams was agreeable. He permitted Laughlin to publish his novel* White Mule, *chapters of which had been appearing in small literary magazines since 1930.*

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The relations between Williams and Laughlin had their periods of tension. Indeed, the publication of White Mule *initiated the first: five hundred copies of the initial printing were sold out; six hundred additional copies had been printed but not bound. Williams went to Norfolk to discover that Laughlin was off in New Zealand ski-racing (skiing was the young publisher's other passion) and nothing could be done until he returned. An exchange on the subject of moving to a more commercially-oriented publishing house is among the letters which follow. Others concern the efforts of both men on behalf of Ezra Pound after his commitment to St. Elizabeth's Hospital following his trial for treason, as well as Williams' assessment of his peers, among them T.S. Eliot (negative) and E.M. Forster (positive). The selection is taken from their extensive collected correspondence, edited, annotated, and introduced by Hugh Witemeyer, which W.W. Norton will publish early in 1989—an extraordinary record of American letters in the mid-twentieth century.*

These letters are from The New Directions Archive, courtesy of James Laughlin. Used by permission of William Eric Williams and Paul H. Williams.

November 29, 1937

Dear Bill:

I have been a long time answering your last letter because every time I think about the subject such a flood of emotion starts rolling around in my head that I can't make any sense.

Your thinking that you want somebody else is a crisis in my life. I had thought I was doing all right in what I had taken up, in what was probably to be my life work, and now, if you doubt me, I don't know.

You are the cornerstone of New Directions and if you left me I think I wouldn't be able to go on with it. I have built my plans around you. You are my symbol of everything that is good in writing, and if you go over to the enemy I just won't know where the hell I'm at.

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Because they are the enemy. Look what they've done to our kind. Look what they've done to you yourself. Would they take the *Mule*?

Now that you have made a success they want you, they think they can exploit you.

It isn't the case of publishers. It is a case of life and death, of right and wrong, of good writers starving and lousy writers going to Palm Beach.

Of course, I see the other side. I see that you need money. Well, if you will trust me for a little while, I'll see that you get that.

Am I being selfish? I don't think so. If I thought it were best for you to go to them I think I have the guts to tell you to go. But it isn't. I honestly believe and know that I can do more for you than they can.

Because you are different from their trade. You are literature and not merchandise. They cannot fake you. Perhaps they could sell a few more books for you than I can because they have a machine, but then look at other things.

Suppose your next book is too good and doesn't pay its share in their overhead. Those fairweather friends will kick you right downstairs.

They don't understand you. They don't know what it's all about. They just want to exploit your success.

And another thing. Will they publish [Robert] McAlmon if you tell them to? Or [Louis] Zukofsky? Will they do anything at all except try to tell you what you should write?

But you are free. You must do what you want to do.

But look into the facts before you decide. Let me tell you some facts that I learned the other day from young Harcourt. It is the case of Kay Boyle.

Now Kay Boyle is a pretty good writer, but what can they with all their advertising do for her—Harcourt tells me the last one did 2600. Well, you say, that is twice what we did with the *Mule*. But now look at the other side: Boyle writes a book of poems—poems that are difficult. Will Harcourt do it? Not on your life! She writes a novelette that she wants published by itself. Will Harcourt do that? Hell no; novelettes don't sell.

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It's like that. They want merchandise. They don't care about writing. They don't even know writing until somebody tells them.

What can I do for you? I can push you steadily with the kind of people who are your proper audience. I can put out good books for you irrespective of whether they pay their way. In New Directions you will be the head man. The thing will build up to you. And if you think you are losing money with me I'll see that you get that. What are Simon and Schuster offering you? I'll meet anything they put up.

Why do I care? Because I know that I need you in order to do anything for the young ones coming on. I can print their books for them. But unless the name New Directions stands for something they'll have a hell of a row to hoe. With you, New Directions does stand for something and the people it prints will get a start and a break. This is not just a monkeyshine. It's the way the thing works.

If you stick with me and Ezra perhaps comes in we'll be able to make a machine that can fight the New York machine. You see it takes more than cash to do it. It takes a *White Mule* and a *Cantos*.

But, in my distress, I am wandering round and round. Perhaps this is all just a ghost. Perhaps you didn't really mean what you said.

To be concrete; this is what I want to do. Bring out the *Passaic* in February, with the two additional stories. Print a thousand more *Mules* now before we chuck the type so that they'll be on hand when needed.

Do the book on your mother next. Then reprint the *American Grain* in a dollar edition. Do that before the other if it takes longer than a year.

Then have a good book about you, either by one guy or by a dozen—a symposium. Then Part II of *White Mule*. Then a volume of essays.

In other words a steady barrage of Williams, that will be backed by articles and reviews and word-of-mouth advertising. Also regular advertising where it is likely to do good. Thus,

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in the present *N[ew] D[irections]* you have a double page spread and we are sending along return cards with it.

I don't mean to slight the poetry. I would like to do that too, but I don't want to swipe anything from Latimer. With certain limitations I think he does a good job.

But I would like to see another collected edition of the poems as I understand the Objectivist one is out of print. Get that and the *Grain* out at a dollar.

But again, you are absolutely free, and you must do what you want. You musn't think of me. But I think you should think of the other writers whom New Directions, made strong by you, could put on their feet.

Well, think it all over awhile and let me know.

Send along the two new stories when you can and tell me whether or not to print more *Mules*.

best,
Jim

Dec. 4, 1937

Dear Jim:

So be it. My chief reason for speaking of a publisher other than New Directions was that I didn't think you wanted to handle a book as bulky as the biography is likely to be. As it turns out it won't be as large a book as I had at first thought it might be. There is no hurry about it at that save that I shouldn't like to have to wait too long—and I frankly didn't think you were interested. Now it's different. We'll go ahead together not any faster than is reasonable but just as far and as persistently as we are able.

It isn't that I need money now, that's not the point. My sole thought was that sometime or other in the near future I ought to try to make some sort of connection which would enable me to get some sort of returns for my writing. I agree that my chances were slim but I felt that I had to try. I am convinced that my best chances now lie with you, looked at quite coldly.

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Nor do I expect the impossible. It was impossible for me to know before this last letter what your plans could be.

The McAlmon incident doesn't please me any too well. The book as it finally appeared wasn't as good as the script I saw. The Spanish stuff at the end (completely unknown to me) was rrrrotten and the parts that were left out (about Carnevali) though somewhat outdated did round the book out into a whole of a sort. There were too many typographical errors uncorrected in the book besides to give it any authority. That whole business was a mistake but the lesson has been learned and should not have to be repeated.

Zukofsky's *A** is another matter. It can't sell but may bring the press a certain distinction. Besides it needs doing for there are moments in it of distinction unique in modern writing. I won't back water on this but, again, no insistence.

Forget the two new short stories. They aren't very good and I need them to keep a couple of customers satisfied. The book is all right without extension. You'll see the stories some time, you ain't missin' anything.

There is one practical point in our arrangements though that needs immediate attention. The biography is now blocked out in very rough form as notes taken during the last ten years of my mother's conversation. There are 179 double spaced typed pages of it. Nothing has been connected up, one inventory follows the other haphazard. Now, there is to be a new quarterly, an art quarterly edited by Dorothy Norman assisted by Edward Dahlberg and financed by Mrs. Norman. The activities of this new group will center around the Stieglitz gallery, An American Place. Mrs. N. whom I met when the Steiglitz tribute was brought out is putting up the cash. She wanted me to be in on the advisory board of editors (unless I am mistaken) but I haven't the time for that. Recently she has been pushing me a little for a major contribution to the first issue and I have consented to send her something.

*WCW had known Louis Zukofsky (1904–1978) since 1928, and first mentioned his long poem *A* to JL in a letter of March 4, 1937. *New Directions in Prose and Poetry 1938* printed "'A'-8" and announced plans to publish the entire poem upon its completion. It was eventually published by Paris Review Editions and was a National Book Award Nominee.

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Just before this last letter of yours I told her that I had the notes of which I have spoken above. She said, fine! She'd print them as they stand. It's lucky you wrote when you did.

Shall I let her print the notes? *White Mule* came out that way. I could say definitely that they are "Material for three chapters" of a book, *Your Grandmother, My Son*, to be brought out in the fall of 1938 (?) by J. L. IV of New Directions. Or would this be inadvisable? I'd see to it that the copyright would be in my name. Let me know what you think. I can always find something else for her if I must but it might be very good advertising for us if she makes a splurge. The final book will be much different.

It's noon now and I have to eat. Let's have your reaction.

Sincerely yours
W. C. Williams

(The collected poems are very important to me, of course. Let me play with them on the outside at least for a year or two. I'm not too sure about Latimer. More of this particular phase another time. W.)

March 26, 1939

Dear Jim:

Saw Robert Frost today, on his sixty-fourth birthday, at the house of a mutual friend in Montclair where he had come for a lecture last night. He's all right, improved with age in spite of what has been said of him. I hope to see him soon again, a more cosmopolitan person than I had been led to believe. He's a good talker, witty, loaded with information and well able to take care of himself anywhere, anytime—unless I'm greatly mistaken. He's going to Harvard next year for a course of lectures.

So long as la grosse Margot can fart and while greasy Joan doth keel the pot I'll drop into rhyme when it pleases me so to do—without injury to anyone and "bow wow!" to [T. S.] Eliot. Eliot is a cultured gentleman and cultured gentlemen are always likely to undersell the market . . . I'm glad you like

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his verse but I'm warning you, the only reason it doesn't smell is that it's synthetic. Maybe I'm wrong but I distrust that bastard more than any writer I know in the world today. He can write. Granted. But—it's like walking into a church to me. I can't do it without a bad feeling at the pit of my stomach: nothing has been learned there since the simplicities were prevented from becoming multiform by arrest of growth—Birdseye Foods, suddenly frozen at 50 degrees below zero under pressure at perfect maturity, immediately after being picked from the canes. It's pathologic with me perhaps, I hope not but I am infuriated by such things. I am infuriated because the arrest has taken place just at the point of risk, just at the point when the magnificence might (possibly) have happened, just when the danger threatened, just when the transition might, just might have led to the difficult new thing. But the God damned liars prefer Popes, prefer "order," prefer freezing—prefer, if you use the image, the sterilization of the Christ they profess. And the result is canned to make literature, with all the flavor, with all the pomp—while the real thing rots, under their noses and they duck to the other side of the street. I despise and detest them. They are moles on a pig's belly instead of tits—Christ, how I hate their guts. And the more so because Eliot, like his monumental wooden throne on wheels that he carries around with him to worship—Eliot takes the place of the realizable actual which is that much held back from realization by precisely his existence.

Perhaps you're right, I'll sell the introduction if I can, possibly to Mrs. Norman. Under separate cover I'm sending you an undergraduate college paper with two of the short shorts of which there are ten or more unplaced which you may want to select from for *N D* '39.

It's probably wise to plan to print the *American Grain* in the dollar series this fall as I feel sure *Mule* won't be ready the way I'm not writing it these days. The only objection left for me is, mightn't it be wiser to print something else than the *American Grain* as my first in that series? Mightn't it be wiser to print a book the parts of which are even more difficult to

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find than the original edition of *American Grain* is today? I refer to a book that could be made up as follows—*The Great American Novel, A Novelette* and either the full text of *Spring and All, Kora in Hell* or the long short story "Old Doc Rivers." The last might be the best, in that case call it, *The Gt American Novel.*

Best luck
Bill

Enclosed a review of Roskolenko's book. In spite of appearance I did not write it with evil intention but after two months of more or less deliberate thought. The review is not to be used—not by us at least. Send it back unless you have other ideas but I see no use in publishing it.

This started out to be a snappy letter telling you that it might be wiser to do a dollar book on my less known prose rather even than *The Am. Grain*—but I was tired and so the clutch started slipping from the first. Christ, I'm tired and so miss the keys, fail to stop when I shd and generally beshit the scene. I'm sorry.

(3/27/39 Frost told me yesterday, to go on, that he has been more or less avoiding me for the past twenty-five years due to the unnecessary insistence of Ezra-the-Pound in London, 1914, that I was the only person in the U.S. that he, Frost was permitted to associate with, the only only one that he could associate with & remain clean. Reverse English, what? W.)

Sept. 24, 1940

Dear Jim:

O.K. let the wops play with it, they won't get anywhere, so what's the difference. It makes me smile that the ol' Idaho What's It [Pound] should even remember me. He's even more of an infant than I believed. In fact that's the answer to all his snot. The only thing is that it's dangerous as hell if taken seriously by thinking people.

It all revealed itself to me yesterday when I was reading his new Canto [*Cantos LII–LXXI*], Chinese Numbers I calls it. He

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doesn't know a damned thing about China, the Chinese or the language—that's what makes him an expert; he knows nothing about music, being tone deaf—that's what makes him a musician. He's a misplaced romantic, that's what makes him a historical realist. And he's batty in the head, that's what makes him a philosopher. But in spite of it all he's a good poet. I had to acknowledge it as I read along in that chinese abaca frame of his enumerating verse. It had charm, it had sweep, it had even childish innocence written all over it. He thinks he's being terribly profound, frowningly serious and all he's doing is building blocks and it's lovely. He hasn't the least idea where he hits true and where he falls flat, he wants to be praised for one thing and he contradicts himself upon the same count in the next paragraph. He's got to be loved to be praised, as one loves a Mongoloid idiot for his sweet character.

I'm wasting my time when I get sore at such a character. Anger simply doesn't apply in his case. As I read I relented, found myself smiling and enjoying. I had to confess I was wrong in trying to treat him as a logical entity, as a poet he is valuable, as a man someone ought to goose him.

All the proofs were sent forward to you last week. I had your card today but shall have to wait until you call on the phone this evening, I suppose, before you can be acquainted with all this. Lousy weather and vile news, no matter who is winning the war it is still vile news.

Yours
Bill

Aug. 7, 1943

Dear Jim:

Enclosed is probably my best recent poem that seems earmarked, because of its length, for you. Use it in the annual.

No *Paterson* for anybody until my present volume of poems is first published and properly published.

Yeah, maybe the Macleod women did kind of miss up on most of the points in the play.

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Ezra is primarily a jackass not a traitor but he's had it in him to be what he's turned out to be from the very beginning. He's been friendly, for instance, toward me and helped me in a gross sort of way but he's never been generous toward me or perceptive in grasping my particular inner value from any really basic viewpoint. Subtly I've always felt a strong barrier between Ezra and myself, a wall in him against everything I really held most valid. Not that he's been precisely patronizing and yet it has been just that, without its being stated.

I didn't mind this because I knew my position to be strong, I knew I could beat him any way he wanted to take me on, either at fencing (where we started) or otherwise—always excepting his genius for words in which I acknowledge him to be a master. He boasted of his mind. To me his mind was fifth rate. He was dull, obtuse toward my reason for being, never got the vaguest glimpse of me, myself. I suspect he's more than a little conscious of this in his limited way and for that reason thought it wise to keep me on his side—in case!

And now the catastrophe has arrived. How shall I act. Shall I still hold him up upon the only ground he has to stand on—his asserted Americanism. He calls himself an American. I suppose I'll have to be generous, as I have always been. But the shits like him are so numerous—Eliot, [Dwight] Macdonald and some others—that I may be too tired to try. I believe the F.B.I. is going to call me in as a witness against Ezra, not from any volunteering on my part. They've warned me. I don't intend to condemn him. For he, like Eliot, could be useful to what I know to be their basis as well as it is mine—even if their brains have to be beaten out in capturing them.

Yours
Bill

Alta Lodge, Alta, Utah.
[August or September 1943]

Dear Bill—

Thanks for sending me Delmore's letter. He is sort of

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hypped on various things, but a good boy in the long pull, I think. He is mad with me because I think his long book stinks pretty bad and made no pains so to say, but I went ahead and published it as many better critics than I thought it was good and I thought its intent was good.

I must have missed the argument in *Partisan Review* that this letter seems to be about.

Hell, I never agreed with you about Old Possum [Eliot]. His poems send me into a blue swoon. I just eat them up, even the late rather sparse religious stuff. The essays are full of trickery but such fun to read—a sort of literary sensuality like banana splits—and no man ever created such architectural opening sentences. Besides which he has always struck me as a wonderful guy, personally. But I suppose in a vague way I sense what you object to in him.

Etc
Jas

Nov. 15, 1943

Dear Jim:

Ever since I got well into Forster's *The Longest Journey*, I've been thinking the best things of you, thanking you for reminding me to read the book but being most appreciative of your having brought the book out at all. That's good reading. It's more than good reading it's important work. It tore me apart and I shall never forget it or cease being thankful to you for bringing it to me. I wanted to say this outright for your satisfaction.

The book builds up a modern hell that is convincing to a terrible degree, the hell of failure to remember the gods. The way Forster builds this up, so British in its bones and flesh, is very nearly forbidding. I was in agony those days, the verge of nervous collapse. I felt eyes in the very actual sky looking at me, very nearly eating into me, accusing me of all the cowardices of which I am capable and which I try my best to

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subdue. The classic hells are mere child's play beside something that can really enter me in the places where I am hiding and drag me into the light. There are hundreds of ways in which the writer, by small truths, word devices, the correct placing of character in certain types, achieves this effect of truth—when it is so rare to find any sort of truth in most writing. Here the truth is everywhere and persistent and never failing. It hurts.

Then it becomes plain (I haven't finished the last fifty pages of the book) why this hell has been built up—in such an outwardly civilized world. When the purpose of the book finally begins to dawn the contrast is so vivid that the journey back to love, the longest journey, is brilliantly illuminated, brought out as though by Klieg lights by the contrast. I wish I could write with such authority, it is wonderful. Hail Britannia! I didn't know she could produce such sons—or had I not better say, such a son. There can't be many. But the character Mr. Failing, a superb character though he only appears in the background, may be the link to show that, unobserved, England can still make love operative. This would be a triumph anywhere but more than ever so in such an environment.

But this letter is primarily to give you the assurance of my appreciation. You've got to go on. Sometimes I'd gladly castrate you had I the chance and even that would be putting it mildly. But this time you've affected me and I'm grateful. Keep it up.

Nothing else special to say except that Harry Duncan seems to be a good guy by his letters, he says the book of poems should be out by March. Best of all around to you, Happy Thanksgiving and all that.

Yrs.
Bill

July 17, 1946

Dear Jim:

Many thanks for the check. And thanks also for the bid to the city, Floss [WCW's wife] and I will make a point to be there

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"week after next" which will be the last week in July—if you make it either the 30th or the 31st. Those are the only possible dates for us. After that we'll be away on our vacation.

Have been hearing fairly frequently from Ezra of late, brief but more or less coherent letters based on the assumption that I need to go to school, study prose style and generally do more reading—all of which has a certain amount of truth in it. But if I suggest that he go back to the 6th grade and learn to write a simple declarative sentence and study the prose style of a barred window—he is silent. He's never got over the pedagogic frenzy when it is to be applied to others. A mind completely arrested in a past age—still speaks of the progress made by Hilda [Doolittle, or H.D., the Imagist poet], of Ford Madox Ford (who was so much wiser in the world than Pound ever could be) etc etc But there the guy is and he still knows how to strut his fake poses of domination. He's dangerous too if allowed to indulge his deficiencies. All partially blocked-out minds endanger the community if permitted to impose their private abnormalities. It's an old story of genius. He can't learn therefore he is (obviously) all-knowing. We've seen it before this. I've hinted that he go to Monseigneur Sheen. What a comedy that would be! And logical too. Maybe Ezra could convert the bastard then the world would indeed be saved.

A frenchman asked me for a story, said you had steered him to me, a french-swiss, Simon by name [Jean Simon, French publisher]. I'm trying to get one up for him, as usual they are always "sailing for Paris tomorrow" or something of the sort. And no pay, of course. Geezus! I don't see why the good Lord didn't make some men with cocks grown into their mouths instead of tongues and some Millays with them sewed into their vaginas and done with it.

What else? "A Choral" which Zukofsky's wife has set to music. *Partisan Review* would be glad to print it—sometime, but not soon. I demanded it back. Sent it to [John Crowe] Ransom. He returned it saying he didn't care for me in that mood. Now Vivienne [Koch] has it—one of the best things (of a sort) which I have ever written. It is a bit long, runs four or five pages double spaced. With Celia's music—or a few pages of

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the best of her music it would make a fairly worthwhile exhibit with plenty of punch to it. It is bawdy and perhaps a bit blasphemous. I don't see how Briarcliff can use it with all those young ladies looking on—to say nothing of the faculty.

So what? I wish it could be brought out as a brochure, music and all. I'd pay for part of it if it could be done. It wouldn't take much paper and there'd be no need of binding. Could it be done under New Directions sponsorship and head? I'll ask Vivienne to send you her copy of the poem. If it comes to a show down I suppose *N D 1947* (if there's to be one) might use it with some profit. But at my age I'd rather let that be devoted to the young uns. I can't see myself there.

Who was the son-of-a-bitch who reviewed *N D 1946* in *Times Book Review?* I've forgot the name, Welsh or Mapes or something like that. What a bastard he was—left out [Henry] Miller and [Paul] Eluard completely. I wrote the "editor" the hottest letter I knew how to compose calling him and his weekly the cowardly bastards they are for operating in the first place without an editor—they appear to have none—and then admitting to their columns such an obviously vicious writer. They did not reply—there is no one to reply from such a source. I'm going to stop reading their dirty sheet. My only reason for reading it at any time has been that it gives the names of certain things published.

So until the week after next. Got anything of Carson McCuller's for me to read? Lend me something. I know of her work but don't remember anything at the moment.

Yrs
Bill

(Ez says "Studs Lonigan" [James T. Farrell] called on him. No comment.)

November 28, 1947

Dear Jim:

It was a pleasure to get your letter. Yes, I'm really afraid the old boy [Pound] *is* off his wack. But I don't see how they can

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keep him where he is [St. Elizabeths Hospital] indefinitely, it costs the state too much money and he isn't that dangerous to it. And how can they try him as a traitor, he just won't be able to stack up against it? He'll go off the track in court. Then they'll confine him again for a while. Finally they'll just release him I suppose. It'll take a long time though.

I'd be delighted if you'd print the play as an issue of *Direction* rather than in the next *N D*. But if you do that I'd want it in full again, it's abridged now you'll remember. I'd want the first scene reincluded for as I see the play now that would become the second scene—with a very slight change in the wording of the text. Also I'd want the short attic scene in the 3rd act. AND I'd like to add a note at the beginning saying how the complicated sets might be avoided. You never did see Margo Joneses enthusiastic praise after a first reading, did you? Oh well—but it's good to omit the play from *N D* and give the space to some of the young boys. One thing tho' Jim, I don't think you did right in turning down Fred Miller this time. I wish you could review your decision and give him space for that piece is tops to me in many ways—you know the one I mean. Come on, write him again.

As to the *Spearhead* party, I feel badly about not having remembered about it. For some asinine reason I thought it was to be held a week after the actual Tuesday (Election Day) on which it took place. I had even suggested to several friends that I wanted them to go with me. I'm glad it went off so well, I was disgusted with myself for my lapse of memory.

Paterson II has been taken nicely in hand by Van Vechten during your absence, it is being printed up now and will, I understand, be bound and finished without further consultation with you. He and I together fixed up the galleys and the page-proofs. It has come out tops. Robert Lowell who was here over a weekend saw the page proofs, read them over twice and pronounced them the best long poem ever written by an American not excluding Eliot—which he may have added knowing my feeling about the Eliot (who, by the way, I hear, is coming to the U.S. more or less permanently this year, God help us! we'll have to fight harder now than ever to maintain ourselves

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untainted). Be that as it may I think you can count on Book II as being more appealing to an audience than Book I ever was. Make your edition large enough! I'll get at Book III after the holidays.

All right, bring it out after Christmas and New Year—but if it's all printed up a month before that I'd sure like to have at least one finished copy in hand so that I may gloat over it, sleep on it and use it as a take-off for the next.

One drawback to using the play in *Direction* is that I had planned, more or less, to launch an assault on you with a view to getting you to use the long-short story of mine of which I spoke to you about a year ago as a *Direction* subject. But that can wait. I am convinced the play should have its chance first.

Remember, the play as you now have it in hand needs careful revision before it comes out under the new plan.

There's much news about all sorts of magazine invitations that come to me for short articles, poems etc etc. Sam Kootz has a book to be out Dec. 15 with reproductions of paintings accompanied by written material in which I am represented—oh there are a dozen small things. I was asked to review Robert Frost's recently published *A Masque of Mercy* for *Poetry*. Sent it away day before yesterday. I spoke at N. Y. U. last night, or night before last, with Vivienne and Allen Tate at a Round Table Conference, "The Poet and His Audience." Wow! I got loose and, I'm afraid, spoiled the show. Allen withheld in haughty silence. But I had some friends. The question period lasted an hour—it was a hot party—about three hundred present.

And so forth. I guess that's all. Except, when I look at some of the stuff that gets printed I have to remember the work of Bob McAlmon who, though you hate him and with some reason, should be brought out again as he is at his best, say in *The Indefinite Huntress* and *Distinguished Air*. Many of the selections in your Modern Classics are nowhere near as good. Try and overcome the bitterness left by your first very decent attempts to work with Bob. He's a son-of-a-bitch in many ways but he is also a sick man psycho-somatically as well as sociologically and his great work of twenty years ago cannot in all fair-

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ness be overlooked today. You should give him honor in the only way you can do it, put aside your dislike and publish him.

Sincerely
Bill

January 18, 1948

Dear Jim:

Sorry about your back, try one with a little more wadding on her next time to keep you out of the gullies. With this snow we're having this year I'm tempted to try the Finnish bath treatment on a few of my own patients with sacro-iliac strain. I'd damn well like to throw at least one of them out the window for the bellyaching she keeps handing me—but she didn't get it skiing, just parturating.

I've been sitting on a pillow myself for the past few days. Mine came from shovelling this fluff we've been bucking for nearly a month now. I got stuck in front of the hospital two weeks ago at 1 A.M. and couldn't even find a shovel in the damned place to fight myself out with. I did finally locate one near the ambulance entrance and nearly ruined myself digging. I feel now that nothing will kill me.

It snowed again last night!

I called up Van Vechten a few days ago. *Paterson* II hasn't yet been printed. He said he was waiting until he had the cloth for the binding before going ahead as he needed the presses for other work. The cloth has now arrived. He promises that the job will positively be finished by the middle of February, sooner if he can make it.

Yes, I'll make up a list of influential names for advance sending out of the book, I'll enclose a small list with this letter. I don't think there's any need of covering the country, ten names would be plenty but if you want more, let me know.

I've been over the ground and made up my 5000 lines for the *Selected Poems*. Let me review it before sending it to you. If you have other lists (I have one I think from Norman Pearson) let me lay them all on the table modifying my own list

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according to their promptings. I think that's the way to do it: not for me to "correct" the other lists but to use my list as the base and add to it whatever poems force themselves in from the outside. I have consulted Floss and shall continue to do so as I think it important to get her non-literary opinion on what will be read.

No word from Jarrell. In fact I have never heard from Jarrell since he was here a year ago.

Floss has suggested and I think it a good suggestion that you give the 3000 francs to Sylvia Beach with our love and best wishes. Do that, please. Tell her we never forget her nor Adrienne Monnier tho', God knows, we do little enough about it. We once had a superb chicken dinner at Adrienne's apartment the bird having been cooked (behind locked doors) by Adrienne herself in her own style, after her own recipe—whatever she did to it it was delicious. Maybe she pissed on it. At least it worked.

What else, what else, what else?

Bill [Williams's son] finishes at the New York Hospital July 1. That will be the signal for big doings here if ever we can get the carpenters and plumbers and painters to sell us their priceless services. I'm or we're going to enlarge my office, making a double job of it, after which (theoretically) Papa will be freer (poorer) to go his way to the demnition bowows—or bow wows. Naturally the transition period will be somewhat uncertain but at least Bill has indicated that he'd like to come here and practice with me. That's the big step. He's still unmarried (I don't, begging Flossies pardon, blame him) so that—oh well, there we are. Money, as usual, will be the first hurdle. The kid ought to weather that after a while then we'll see.

One of the English proffs at N. Y. U., a man named C. G. Ross, has been showing interest in my plays. He says he thinks something can be done with them and has initiated several moves, separate for each play by which he thinks I can have one or both put on for at least an experimental hearing. And speaking of the play, the last play, do get Creekmore to send me the copy as you have suggested so that I can get it ready for *Direction*. That would be my next job. Let me know more

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of that: when you'd want the thing finished and all that. I think I can make quite a bit more of it than now shows.

I wrote a piece on the Eliot for a little 4 page sheet printed by a disgruntled and disgusted guy named [Dallam] Simpson from Galveston, Texas. It'll be out any minute now, as soon as I get hold of a copy of his sheet I'll send it to you. What I said about Eliot has nothing to do with his inheritance of the King's old underwear but dates from his advice to us in this country that we may now read Milton without fear of damage to our testicles. Geez what a shit he has turned out to be—to the enhancement of his charm, I must confess and drawing power among the American snots. Not that he isn't a sort of a good poet or a good poet of a sort but from the way they bend down to kiss the hem of his metaphorical garments—cerements, I was going to say—you'd think he possessed the universal genius of a Saint Anthony instead of being a very frail sister indeed.

And Auden has been inducted into the American holy of holies, The Academy of American Letters—or Arts and Letters. Holy, Holy, Holy. Lord God Almighty—even thy shit shall be preserved in silver chalices for time to dote upon. More power to the boys—but not for me. I'll bet Oscar [Williams] gets it before long and he really should get it except that he's a Jew, poor guy. I'm really beginning to like the guy. He knows what makes 'em tick. I see even Laughlin included him in his *Spearhead*.

I'll speak to McAlmon again. I confess I still don't understand Bob. I've been apprehensive recently that he may not be feeling so fit. I hope he isn't going downhill physically.

Floss sends her salutations.

Yrs.
Bill

Sept. 16, 1948

Dear Jim:

What do *I* know? I'll be sixty-five tomorrow and what have I ever made out of writing? No more than a few hundred dol-

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lars a year (when I make it) with an occasional prize thrown in. That's the sum of it. When I was flat in bed I had a letter from *Poetry* asking me for some autobiographic notes. I took it as a joke and a time killer, I have no interest in an autobiography and never have had but when they asked for something I bought a 15 cent copy book, took up a pencil and diddled away. You know the size and resources of *Poetry*, what could they expect of me?

But when the issue containing the first installment ["Some Notes Toward an Autobiography"] came out I had a telephone call from [Pat] Covici. He was all off base, thought the writing wonderful, asked me if he could have the book and virtually promised me a Pulitzer prize on it. I replied that I had no interest in books or prizes, that I was doing a very brief thing for *Poetry* that would run to perhaps fifty pages at the most and that that would be all. Besides, I told him, I have commitments, I have to finish *Paterson* Books III and IV together with several other things and that an autobiography didn't interest me anyway.

But he wouldn't quit. If I did finish the thing some time would I let him print it? Sure, why not? I told him. And that's the entire story.

And while we are speaking of this let me add that not another single person has so much as mentioned that I wrote that piece in *Poetry*, not one. Not a single peep have I received concerning it from anybody. That's what I am up against, not from you not even from some enthusiastic young poet, male or female. I have been asked to give them the next installment when I get ready and there it stands. I've been busy and worried as hell about this and that, I have written a few pencil pages in the copy book and not even copied them out. Instead I've used what time I had on *Paterson* III which is well advanced. The rest of the time I've been plugging at my practice.

But let's get down to brass tacks. All I've promised Covici (by phone, not writing) is what I'm doing for *Poetry*, no more and no less. It might run to 50 or 60 pages taking in my whole life. But his enthusiasm set me going. I have planned a big book if anyone wants it, a full book really telling the whole

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story. Covici could still do a flash booklet and not have any hold on me for anything else—if I ever find time for either. I am in no way obligated—even tho' it might be to my financial interest to throw him the whole thing (which I am not inclined to do). There you have it.

Now as to your own heavy obligations. If you [word or words missing] $75,000 dollars into the publishing game at the moment it can't all be final loss. Some of it is bound to come back. I am pretty sure you're not losing (even if you're not making) anything on the *Paterson* publications. You're not asking my advice on what you publish and never have asked my advice on it—nor would I want you to. But I tell you frankly you've published a lot of unsaleable crap in my opinion. Maybe you have to do that to pick up a good one now and then but you haven't pushed the good ones or backed them hard enough, really driven a few promising items home. Instead you've gone on to some other project. That's where you've thrown your money away—if you have thrown it away. Which I do not believe—even if for the moment you are in the red.

If you drove your items home and followed them more closely, kept them in print and pushed the booksellers harder on the few good items you have you'd be better situated in my humble opinion. Damned if I'll accept blame for my doings.

I have thought I saw and I believe I do see a long range plan on your part but a difficult one to carry through and one involving a considerable investment which will not pay off on short notice. It is that you are digging in where possible on writers with a name to make who will within a span of years bring in the chips for you. It is smart and it is recognized here and there as good business. But you've got to prune the non-promising and you've got to drive harder on what is good. You've got to polish your own taste and you've got to work like hell day and night at it. Otherwise the whole venture is just a rich man's foible. You've never worked at it, in my opinion, as hard as the job requires. You've had too many other interests.

I don't know that Harcourt-Brace will want the *Wedge-*

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Clouds book at this moment. You know that any publisher prints a book of poems only because he hopes to grab off something rich later. I went through it with the Boni Brothers and some others. Duell, Sloan & Pierce have been after me for years to do my mother's biography. I've wanted you to do several things that you refused to do—like the Quevedo thing. Your judgment was that it was no good. But my judgement is that you were wrong. That's a matter of taste but that's the sort of thing that has sent me to others.

If you want the full autobiography it's yours—if you think you want to handle it but the short thing, if he wants that sort of thing, goes to Covici. If you don't give a damn I doubt that I'll ever even write the long story. And don't think for a moment that I don't deeply appreciate what you're doing with the *Collected Poems*, the Koch book and the reprints. But I tell you frankly that if you think you're going to lose money on them I'd appreciate it if you'd chuck 'em in the fire.

Best
Bill

February 7, 1950

Dear Bill:

Thanks for yours of February 3rd. It does my old heart good to see you young fellows kicking up your spry heels with such an eruption of energy. I only wish I had half your vitamins. More power to you, I hope you get all those books written before Christmas so that you can start on a new batch before the 4th of July. But seriously, it is fine that you are planning to give up the medical work altogether and concentrate on the literature.

I'm sure you know that I would like to go along with you on the publishing of the books. My feelings would be very much hurt if you went anywhere else. My thoughts have been running toward a uniform edition of your works. How does that strike you? The *Complete Poems* would be in two volumes, of which we could get out the first one fairly soon,

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and there could be a volume of short stories to match it, and then later on other volumes of assorted prose in the same format. I think the books could be designed in such a way that material that you write in the next years could be added to subsequent bindings.

Why don't we start fairly soon on the volume of short stories and first volume of the really complete poems? If we began getting busy about them now they would be ready to come out by next fall or winter. But I hope you will really make the effort now to make these volumes definitive. Have you got all your stuff collected so that you can run through it and see what you want to preserve in these definitive volumes?

I haven't seen any reviews of Vivienne [Koch]'s book yet, but there ought to be some soon. Also some pieces on the *Paterson*, though poetry is always slow in being reviewed.

Yes, we are all very sorry here to lose Dave McDowell, but he received a very flattering offer from Random House, and I didn't think it was fair to try to hold him back from a bigger opportunity. After all, the kind of books that we publish here are never going to make much money for a young man who has a family and needs it. Now and then we have a bit of luck, like this Bowles book [*The Sheltering Sky*], or some of the [Thomas] Merton, but by and large the kind of things that I like to do are pretty thin pickings from the profit angle. Let's hope that your autobiographical book will prove to be one of the exceptions. I'm very keen to see that.

I'm off to the West for a bit of skiing, but don't let that dampen your ardor. We can carry on by mail. My address out there will be c/o The Hotel Jerome in Aspen, Colorado.

As ever,
Jim

May 8, 1950

Dear Bill,

Many thanks for your good letter of April 30th which reached me in Washington, where I have been paying daily

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visits to Ezra out at the hospital. The old boy is certainly alive and kicking. He started giving me Chinese lessons this morning, but it didn't mean a thing . . .

I am very glad to hear that we are getting closer to a program which will be satisfactory for all concerned. I shall try to give you in this letter a few of the ideas which are in my mind for a long term, overall agreement, and possibly you can mull them over and then let me have your comments and additional suggestions.

First of all, there is no objection to having the copyright in your name. I would like, however, from now on to get my half share of the anthology fees, which you will find to be a general practice in all publishing houses.

As I visualize it, we would send you a check the first of each month for $250 for the next three years. These would be advances against royalties on all your books, and against your half share of all the permission fees. As new books come along we would make contracts for them at prevailing royalty rates. That is, 10% of the retail price up to 5,000, 12% up to 10,000, and then 15%. We would also like our usual half cut on the foreign translation rights.

You, for your part, would give us first crack at all the books which you write from now on. If it should come along that you would wish to do one of these little specialty volumes with one of the small presses, you would offer it to us first, and then, if we didn't want to do it, you would let them have it, though with the understanding that the basic rights would rest with you so that the material would [be] available for your collected edition.

I feel quite certain, however, from what you have told me of your plans that we will want to do all of those new books which you project, as soon as you have them ready. We would also want to do the collected poems and the collected stories, probably beginning with the poems.

I don't believe that you need to worry about our distribution. It is getting better all the time, and I suggest that you come into the office some day and look over the records of our outlets. This is the way you ought to judge the matter, and

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not on the basis of yaps which come in from people who live in towns where there are no bookstores, or who are looking for a book that is out of print, or a first edition. When you see the number of outlets which we have all over the country, and for that matter all over the world, and the volume of business which we are doing with them, I believe you will be convinced that we can sell your books if anybody can. And I think that we can.

Let me know how these ideas for the long term contract strike you, and feel free to make any suggestions that you want. I want you to have the peace of mind and feeling of security necessary for you to do your best work.

See you soon,
James Laughlin

[March 31, 1951]

JAMES LAUGHLIN, TEMPLE LODGE. LAKE LOUISE.

THOUGHT YOU WOULD WANT TO KNOW BILL WILLIAMS TAKEN TO PASSAIC GENERAL HOSPITAL ROOM 219 PASSIAC NEW JERSEY CEREBRAL HEMORRHAGE CONDITION CRITICAL NEXT WEEK OR TEN DAYS SHOULD DECIDE. STILL HOPE.

Stanley Moss

April 7/51

Dear Jim—

Thanks for your note. Bill is doing well.—His recovery is remarkable—but he will need a long rest. He is to remain in the Hospital for three weeks—then go away for a month. —Then—we'll see!

The energy that burns in that guy is too much for one human to burn up! He's rarin' to go *now*—and is anything but a *good* patient. Thank God he's in the Hospital!—I'd go mad if he were at home. He resents the situation and tries to minimize it out of all proportion!—

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Alta must be beautiful now. Wish I could see it. Don't break any bones—Bill said to thank you for your note.—

Sincerely—
Floss

9/4/53

Dear Jim:

The proper handling of letters from friends certainly does present an unsolved problem when it comes to activities of a literary executor. Much has to be left to the discretion of the man on the job. John Thirlwall who has taken an interest in writing a new biography of me and as a matter of fact has already been working on it for half a year seems a person that can be trusted with any available materials. That's all I can say. Look him over and give him a chance. You have my permission to show him my letters to you but if there is any one of them you wish to withhold for personal reasons I think it should be understood that you will do so.

You realize, or do you, how close I have grown to Dave McDowell in the past two or three years. To be brief, I have let him have my new book of poems which he promises to bring out next year. It was only fair to let him have it in view of all that has taken place between us in the recent past. I hope you will understand.

At the same time I have no intention of severing my connection with you, too much is involved emotionally and in a business way for me ever as far as I can prevent it to permit that to happen. Specifically I still have plans for bringing out an additional volume in the *Paterson* Series, called *Paterson* V. This belongs to you, unless you do not want it. It has to do with the world after I am dead. It is already partly written.

I'll never forget your kindnesses to me, how you entertained both Floss and me at your aunt's house and how magnificent you were with the bringing out of the first edition of my *Collected Poems* [1938]. Those were great times for me. I am much interested in your activities in India and wish you luck

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with them, the young painters, from what I am told, are much interested in what is coming recently out of India.

Your family must be growing up.

Best of luck
Bill

September 8 [1953]

Dear Bill—

I am terribly upset over your giving the new poems away. Really how can you be so brutal? I thought we had an understanding that N D would go on with the poems.

Quite apart from questions of sentiment and honor, it messes things up so to have poems which we will want to add to the *Collected* eventually under another imprint.

Can't you give David something else, Bill—your letters perhaps—and let's, in a world that gets lousier by the day, try to hold together what was, I think, a pretty fine relationship.

You didn't return Thirlwall's letter, which I need to answer. I'll go along with him.

Best,
Jim

9/9/53

Dear Jim:

I'm sorry you feel the way you do about my decision to let Random House do my latest book of poems. You did not feel that way when I was trying to sell *The Wedge*. The publication of that book by a press other than your own did not and does not now prevent the assembling of the collected edition, if it ever comes about from appearing under one imprint.

The need of money, which you have never felt, is a determining factor in many of my dealings now-a-days. I get much more than I have ever got from you under the new arrangement.

But I can't for the life of me see why you have been upset

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in the long run. Sentiment is a factor to be dealt with but at times like the present it has to be laid aside especially if the rewards outweight it. There is no real loss to you, save sentiment, that has been incurred but to me it is very nearly a life and death matter to which I trust you will accommodate yourself when you think it over.

Do not let your judgment concerning any of our relations be disturbed by our new relations but take it in your stride as you can so easily do and trust me as in the past to keep in mind the relations that have always pertained between us to our mutual benefit.

Yours sincerely
Bill

Sept. 23, 1958

Dear Jim—and his wife:

It was a beautiful party you gave Floss and me for my seventy fifth birthday and the publication of *Pat[erson]* 5. We sincerely thank you for it all. And also for the return of the telegrams and other messages. It'll take me a week to catch up with them all. I'm not as sprightly as I was.

It's a beautiful book you, Jim, have made for me. Who knows anything of the future but if there is to be a *Paterson* 6 in the next couple of years there is no disloyalty in saying that I shall ask you to do it.

Glad that my final remarks at the supper table were not taken amiss by Mrs. Laughlin.

Sincerely yours
Bill

Oct. 15, 1958

Dear Jim:

I have to report, regrettably, that less than a week ago, in fact last Saturday night I had another stroke—and if it were not for this machine I'd be sunk.

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It came at a bad time. The show at Johns Hopkins had to be cancelled much to my disappointment and I take it—theirs and with other engagements. It is not too bad a shot but enough to lay me low. We'll see how much I am discommoded. Lucky it didn't come a week ago.

That's all I wanted to tell you. Best regards to your wife, she made many friends at "the Party." I'm getting on all right under the care of Floss. Nuff said.

Sincerely yours

P.S. Please notify MacGregor of what has occurred. I can still sign my name with my left hand—after a fashion. W.

10/21/58

Dear Bill—

Just a line to say how much I appreciated your writing, and to tell you that Ann and I are thinking of you and rooting for you to jump this new hurdle as you have done the others. It's wonderful to all of us to see how you meet these things, Bill—as if they were nothing at all—and I just wish I had 1/10th of your guts and savoir vivre.

Best to Floss!
Jim

Feb. 1, 1959

Dear Jim:

I'm sending the enclosed original poem ["To Be Recited to Flossie on Her Birthday"] to keep as your own, may very well be my last, it says all I have ever wanted to say. Use it as you think fit. I did think to ask you to have a few copies printed up for keepsakes thinking Floss might be interested but that must be up to her.

I am at the moment involved in making not more than ten poems using Brueghel's paintings as models. That will keep me busy I hope for some time to come.

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I wanted you to see this poem and record it—after all I have been a writer, writing has been important to me.

Sincerely
William Carlos Williams

October 23, 1959

Dear Bill—

Just back from the other side, and glad to hear from you, though distressed that there has been some snafu on your gift orders. Will look right into it.

Bob is fine, though I often wonder how he stands the pressure. Many a night he comes back to the office after dinner and works away til midnight. It has been especially bad lately because two young ladies in the order department left at once. The head of the department moved to California to live, and one of the assistants produced an offspring. It was very difficult to find replacements, despite all we were hearing not long ago about unemployment. We have them now, but there were some bad moments, when the editorial crew were getting out the orders . . . and I think it must have been then that your requests got sidetracked.

I don't want to contact Bob on it this weekend—I hope he is getting some rest—but I'll have a word to him on Monday and feel sure he will call you if the original orders can't immediately be found, or have one of the girls do so if he is tied up.

I am very much worried about Uncle Ezry, who is really sitting on the bottom of the black hole. A terrible depression and collapse of physical energy. He talks a lot about dying, and just lies around and broods. He is back up at the castle now with Mary.* She writes that he looks well, but there is no improvement in his spirits. I've been trying to persuade him to take some treatment—some of these new drugs—but he won't

* Mary de Rachewiltz, Pound's daughter, at Brunnenburg Castle in Tirolo di Merano, Italy.

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go anywhere where the specialists are. He lets the local man jab him with something—vitamins maybe?—but it doesn't seem to help.

Marcella [Spann, Pound's assistant], as you may have heard, couldn't take it any more—she hated Italy—and has gone back to Texas. Dorothy takes it, but is not at all strong any more. It's really a very tough situation, and I came away with a rather hopeless feeling about it, because Ez, miserable as he is, is still so damn stubborn, he just won't listen to sense.

Best to you both,
Jim

Jan. 4, 1960

Dear Ann & Jim:

The pears were—and are still—delicious. Much thanks. They are really poems which Virgil according to his own witness had a preference for. At least he mentioned them in a poem. Nice of you to have thought of us.

In about another year I'll be submitting to you another book of my recently collected poems without any compunction, just for you to look at. It's a strange thing still to be writing poems. If I did not feel that I have something to contribute to the art I'd shut up tighter than a clam—but the young by their inability force me to keep eternally at it.

You have both been very kind. Flossie joins me in wishing you the seasons greetings.

Affectionately yours
Bill

January 7, 1960

Dear Bill,

That's good to know that Virgil also liked pears! I'll have to track down the reference some day. I imagine it must be in the *Georgics*.

That is great news that you are thinking of another volume

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in the *Collected Poems* series. We certainly would like to add a third, in the same format, and I know that there is some wonderful stuff waiting to go into it.

And I think too that at some point we ought to be thinking about adding some pages to the little *Selected* paperback, drawn from the later individual volumes, if the necessary arrangements can be worked out with the two other publishers involved. The time to do it would be when we reprint that little volume, and I'll have a look one of these days and let you know what the timing might be.

I've just had a wonderful letter from Eva Hesse in Munich, describing Uncle Ezra's triumph at Darmstadt. He went up there for the opening of the *Women of Trachis**. It's so good that I'll copy off a bit of it for you: "Ezra was invited by the Mayor of Darmstadt to be a guest of honor of the city. Thus Ezra and Mary turned up in Munich two days ahead of the premiere. Ez was very much a 'reclining figure' at first, but very soon livened up. On the day of the premiere we took him to Darmstadt by car and he donned what he called his "fancy suit"—a sort of vintage velvet jacket in which he used to attend concerts in Rapallo before the war, and in which he incidentally makes an imposing figure. In the excitement of the journey he, alas, forgot to pack any shirt studs, and also the crazy invention his tailor had provided for keeping his pants up refused to function. However, the hotel management finally succeeded in making him seaworthy and so we all proceeded to the theater. The theater in Darmstadt is located in the wing of a baroque castle and, to Ezra's concern, does not have any private boxes. That meant that we had to sit among the audience. Ez was near to decamping on learning this, but when we pointed out that this was hardly what Mr. Eliot would do under such circumstances, he quieted down. Though not on the same high level as the one in Berlin, the Darmstadt

* Pound's translation of Sophocles' tragedy *The Women of Trachis* was first published in the *Hudson Review*, VI, 4 (Winter 1954), and first performed on BBC Radio on April 25, 1954. It was produced in Hesse's German translation (1958) at the Schiller Theater in Berlin and in Darmstadt.

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production went over very well and Ez visibly enjoyed himself. Just before the end he suddenly rose from his seat and made a dash for the exit. However, instead of racing out of the theater as we had feared, he suddenly appeared on the stage, where the cast were receiving their applause. A great new wave of applause set in as Ezra showed up in the spotlight, and there were long ovations—he was called back to the curtain some five or six times. He cut a very fine figure standing out there—one critic described the incident as the 'final appearance of the real Herakles,' another referred to his 'Fuerstlieke Erscheinung,' yet another, in more ironic vein, referred to it as the 'Satyrspiel.' Afterwards, we went on to the Mayor's reception, where Ezra conducted lively conversations with the Mayor, the Minister of Culture, and members of the cast. The Mayor was, it is true, caught unprepared when Ezra demanded a portion of ice cream with his Mosel wine, but he responded nobly and sent out for some."

I wish I could have seen it, and it's certainly nice that the old boy is having some fun after all he's been though. The last few months he seems to have been in much better shape mentally. What he really needs is an audience, and everyone over there says that he brightens up immediately when someone comes along for him to talk to.

By the way, in the same letter, Eva Hesse talks about your *Many Loves*. She wonders if it would be possible for her to see a copy of the acting version as it was put on at the Living Theater. She has quite a standing now as a translator and adaptor of American plays—she did one of Jeffers', and the MacLeish one on Job, as well as Ezra's—so I think it would be fine if she could do yours, if you wanted her to, and it would work out. Please let me know how to proceed on this, won't you?

I believe that we've already sent you the [Denise] Levertov book, and the one by [Gregory] Corso will follow soon. Are you interested in Kerouac? We are getting out a little limited edition of one of his things [*Excerpts from Visions of Cody*], and I'd like you to have it if you are interested.

We've all been well, and we're expecting a new addition

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some time in February. Hope it will be a girl. They really are great. I get more fun out of Leila, who is now fifteen, and a real dandy. Took her skiing for a few days this past vacation in Vermont and we really had a ball together. But I suppose some young squirt will grab her off before long. Hope I can take it.

With best to you both,
as ever,
Jim

Jan. 8, 1960

Dear Jim:

We laughed fit to kill at your account of Ez at Darmstadt. It is wonderful that he had so good a time as the guest of the city—and that his play or his translation of the play went so well: it puts me in mind of a play by Schiller I attended at Leipzig at the opera house there in 1906. It was *Die Rauber* one of the poet's early plays in which he permitted his actors to rant and rave to their heart's content. I was shocked being more used to restrained art of Ibsen at the time—but I was there and took it all in while the Zeppelins floated above us in the mist of the city.

I'll send you a copy of the acting script of *Many Loves* myself that you may forward it to Eva Hesse in Munich—if she does not already have, I'll get it off this very afternoon—I'll send it through the regular N. D. office.

So you have a 15 year old daughter, like to introduce her to my own 15 year old granddaughter, I bet they'd make an attractive team. It's amazing how they grow up. Bill has nothing else but daughters, three of them the youngest 2! Very attractive.

We'll get to the other business, as I say, in another year. Best to your wife.

Sincerely
Bill

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Nov. 11, 1962

Dear Jim:

I received this morning the notice from England about my books, it shows, according to what the critics say, a lively interest in my books. If it only showed a corresponding penetration on the part of the critics I'd be made. Their leaders, or they that should lead them, have gone far astray—much to my loss.

Maybe it is still not too late, but I doubt it.

You have been very faithful, it is deeply appreciated. I wish I could write as I could formerly.

Affectionately
Bill

April 3/62

Dear Jim:

I finally got your letter enclosing your letter, enclocussing your letter which was so ompportant foe me, thannkuok yuon very much. In time this fainful bsiness will will soonfeul, will soon be onert. Tnany anany goodness. If S lossiee eii wyyonor wy sinfsignature.

I hope I hope I make it

Bill

Dear Jim—Bill wants so much to communicate with you—He has great difficulty as you can see—but he insists that it be sent.

Best as always
Floss

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Jim Powell

Housekeeping

After the old man fell
and broke his hip working in the garden
the shrubs next door grew free,
each year the pale new leaves
crowding denser shade against the walls

all summer, ivy over
spilling the eaves, the old couple both grown
too frail to trim it, and later
gone to a home and the house
left vacant, blinds drawn for nine months, then cleared out,

painted and sold. Today
when my new neighbors woke me, cutting back
the overgrowth, on the sill
beside my head dead bees
lay clustered—half a dozen, their dark wings

folded, their bronze fur
gold dusted in the sun on a white ledge
above the buzz and sudden
shriek of electric saw
teeth biting down on green wood, faltering

against a pyracantha
limb's sinewy resistance. At breakfast last fall
before they hung their shades
I used to see them through
those thorny branches setting up housekeeping,

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arranging rooms, and once
that December when her mother came
to help them settle in
she sat at their back window
rocking her infant grandson in her lap

for hours—whispering over
his smooth head, or sometimes singing. I wonder
if his grandmother told him
as mine did me in her still
small voice that the law of this world is woundedness

and that all these shining
presences are put here for signs and keep
their secrets in the folds
of a fire enticing
as the wavering blue circles of gas flame

under the heater grate
down the hall, the ones lit there to blister
little fingers, ones
that grasp too greedily
and won't be taught to mind and not to touch

but look through semblances
to find the portents and commandments shadowed
there, veiled out of reach
of time. Virgil says
that in the underworld where each of us

suffers his own shade
our unborn souls are stung by such dire lust
to see the blinding daylight
that we swarm like bees
to drink the waters of oblivion,

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furious to resume
the weight of incarnation and forget
past lives taking up
residence in new bodies,
helpless. Or cradling his oblivious bald head

in her arms did she gentle him,
nursing her promise with a song in her ragged
alto about the new shoots
that would be waving outside
in the breeze to welcome him this spring rolling

laughing on the grass
while in his father's hands beneath the eaves
the long bright blades
of the pruning shears are snicking
at the ivy, letting sunlight in at the windows.

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S. Ben-Tov

The Foucault Pendulum at Hanover*

The wind and the rain, the trees swung like a bell
all across Massachusetts in the fall,
and the torn fog steaming from the yellow mountains,
and the last leaf smell—

what gusts hit the windows! What unmade
clouds raced over your bed,
and how I swore that we were not entangled—no,
we were swayed;

we had visited the tower of air.
Down its storied shaft hung the straight cable
of the gold pendulum bob, an onion dome
travelling on its tip

behind the rail, the plaques. As you explained,
the bob rolled toward our feet
and then rolled back
fractionally east: the floor turned around.

Then came a rush of wind shaking the leaves out
of its folds as it swept the earth
like a dress blown backwards,
and our first steps on the ground.

* The Foucault pendulum is used to demonstrate the earth's axial rotation

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Donald Revell

Why History Imitates God

The near past and the near future are poor,
with no accession of hands, no bright legs—
useless, untender absences with bronze torsos.
Each day, there is the hollow of good works
and inside that, an hour with the statues
I have collected of such hard torsos,
parts of bodies I cannot comfort
with hands and legs, features and good works.
For my own comfort, I press my face against them.
It makes the bronze strange and that eases
the occult poverty of the hour,
a body smaller than mine. I'm poor. My house
has no hands or legs and the near silence
of the statues dies away as I move closer.

I like to believe that they were never children,
just as the near past and future never
lift their hands to the ribbons of a swing
or look to their mother, a distorted face
captured in the hard mirrors of bronzes.
I like to believe I say the things I must
the only way possible. I have a house.
It is poor. The way I feel about time is poor.
One hour in any direction looks starved
or distorted with anger, like the face
of the bad woman I refuse to remember
although a part of her body is repeated
many times in the next room, her limbs
the tenderness and silence of other houses.

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It is time to know what everyone not wasted
in childhood knows. The body is too many
pieces, scattered among inexpressive
desires too strong and spiteful to end
anywhere but the poorhouse, the shanty museum
of torsos. I am no child and wasted nothing
in childhood that might explain this poverty
of cold change from hour to hour, from body
to one more casting of the same body
I will never use. I do not want my life.
It is safer elsewhere with limbs, in other houses.
I want to be set free in the next room
to press my face against the strange heat
of bronze whose silence could not love me less.

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Marjorie Welish

Greeting

There where occasion has been, a steady snow—
or is it boundlessness
that occasionally drops to the ground
only to leave branches swaying.

The sun is coming out
to feel an accustomed transparency.
The sun is coming out
to experience peace, pious and blind,

or to experience peace that attaches to custom in courtesy,
drawing comfort from the oceanic
semi-automatic sequence of tasks so recently irritating:
now they fall of their own weight.

The sun is coming out
to see how it feels to live affirmatively,
or to see how it feels to live an endorsing image,
or to see how it feels to live an endorsing image under full sail.

For those who feel a compulsion to ruin or complicate
but always to change the specimen,
the challenge may be to let peace enter the skin
and like it, merely:

merely peace entering the ocean slightly exercised
as in a barometer,
or merely forthcoming,
boundless in a prologue.

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David Trinidad

Hand Over Heart

I look up at the clock.
It's time to go, so
I cover the typewriter
and calculator, lock my radio
in the file cabinet
and straighten my desk.
On the way out, I unplug
the Christmas tree lights.
I am rarely the last one
to leave the office.

Alone in the elevator,
I listen to a lilting
rendition of "Frosty
The Snowman." The door
slides open. Outside,
it's already dark. I say
good night to the guard
in the parking lot, wait
for my car to warm up.
It does and I drive off.

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Halfway home,
I turn on the radio.
Madonna sings
her new hit, "Open
Your Heart." At
the same time, on
another station,
Cyndi Lauper sings
her latest song, "Change
Of Heart." Not that long
ago, it might have
been Brenda Lee
singing "Heart In Hand"
and Connie Francis
belting out any number
of her most popular
tunes: "My Heart
Has A Mind Of Its
Own," "Breakin' In
A Brand New Broken
Heart," "When
The Boy In Your Arms
(Is The Boy In Your
Heart)" or "Don't
Break The Heart
That Loves You."
I don't know why
I think about
such things.

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I park the car
in the garage, walk
across the courtyard
and check the mailbox.
A few bills, ads,
Christmas cards
from friends I no
longer feel that
close to. No
messages on my
phone machine.

"I'm sorry,"
you said last
night. You seemed
sincere. Later,
I sat in my car
and cried. *Was it*
love? I thought
it was love. I mean
it felt like love.
It really did.

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John Updike

Klimt and Schiele Confront the Cunt

(Reflections after Viewing the Vienna Show at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, 1986)

That women in their marble glory still
had pubic hair so startled Ruskin he
turned impotent, and had to be divorced.
The nineteenth century, for all its love
of flesh, preferred its female hair to stream,
like emanations of divinity,
a rippling ghostly river, from the head.

Vienna, though, was looking lower. Freud
sat brooding high above that cloudy couch
where golden heads, and *braun*, materialized
to spill their mind's secretions, much as Klimt
and Schiele pencilled pussies blackly on
their nudes and even limned the labia
that frame the blameless hole men love and seek

and dread. For Gustav Klimt, whose early work
shows much of Edvard Munch's hysteria—
such staring, snake-haired, toxic femmes fatales!—
the pubic patch (once lightly called,
by young Adele Astaire, the "Ace of Spades")
plays hide-and-seek beyond a bent-down head
or tucked between the buttocks, just a curl.

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For Egon Schiele, born much closer to
la fin du siècle (*fin* is feminine,
you may observe), the pencil gouges deeper,
and something quite like famine dulls the eyes
while fingers seek the masturbator's groove.
The flesh is gaunt and splotchy but alive,
and appetite torments its toothless mouth.

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Alice Mattison

During the Night

Broken or meddled with,
the alarm goes off at three.
I jump from sleep, crying out—what?
Immediately, I've forgotten—something
wrong—and you say, not
sleepily, a while later, "What you said
was as disturbing as the alarm."
"What was it?" "I can't remember."

At four, silent, we are both awake.
At last I get up
though it's so cold. . .
In the kitchen
I sip some orange juice that's
sweet and thick, like its color, while
looking out at old snow,
how the streetlight
illuminates heaps and cracks as if
to prove something unpleasant.

When I lie down again
the back of my knuckles
happens to rest on your belly.
Your skin feels hot but I suppose you are cold
because in a moment you stand and
straighten each cover—first
the bottom one, jammed at our feet;
you reach in to pull out its edges, then
come around to my side. One by one,
the blankets disentangle, and
folds and catches open. When you're done,
for an instant, all the covers float.

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Apondé, the Magnificent Times Two

Thomas Glynn

I.

He was born before his time, and since it was not his time had to be put back in and born again. He would not stay in the crib. His mother thought he had wings. She thought he could fly around the room. But he did not have wings. He had fins. Small fins, black and oily, which he soon lost. He could speak Aramaic, but forgot how to speak it when he lost his fins. His mother was an Irish maid in a rich Paraguayan household. No one knew who his father was, except his mother. He was born with black hair, which turned to gold in two days, which turned red three days after that. The colors of his eyes went from brown to blue to hazel in one week. In place of a little finger on his left hand he had a claw which curled back against his hand. He was quiet for seven months, then he screamed for one month, then he was quiet for three years, spoke seven words over the next four months, remained quiet for the next year, then spoke perfectly accented Castillian Spanish in his sixth year despite the fact that no one around

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him spoke a word of Spanish. German and English were the preferred languages, isolated in a sea of Spanish. Because he had been born twice, he was a person within a person, just as German and English were languages within a language.

II.

He matriculated at the Ecole de Naturalis Historia where he communicated by writing notes on a tablet or filling a large blackboard with legible script in white chalk whose dust formed long ridges on the floor. Because of his silent ways he was teased by his classmates until he raked one of them on the cheek with his claw, carving a musical signature, a clef, which sighed when the carved-up boy slept at night. The boy's parents, an unmusical family, demanded restitution from him, and he agreed, though he was puzzled. Which one of me do you want restitution from? he asked. They were not amused, and they boxed his ears. There, they said, which one of you feels the pain? He excelled in mathematics and botany, and started to grow wings in his twelfth year, a phenomenon which he hid by wearing several shirts, even while bathing. At the age of thirteen the wings dropped off, replaced by acne which was oily, facial hair, enlarged testicles, and a changing voice. His eyes were hazel, his hair gold and his arms well muscled. He lifted heavy things for his classmates who were generally too rich and spoiled to do much lifting for themselves and who prided themselves on their flabby arms. He was known for his fine singing voice, though he hardly spoke. When he was fourteen his hair turned red. He began to see great things; he called them pictures in his mind, and told his classmates about them. In great detail he saw mountains and buildings split apart and gigantic waves of water spurting forth, engulfing everything around them. The waves would go through people and change them into fish. His classmates sat waiting for the school buildings to explode, and for the giant waves that would come. They argued about what kind of fish they would become. He told girls that he could give them birds, that he had great eagles stored inside his body. He told his

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teachers that rocks were plants, that stone grew, that boulders had a living heart. He started to lift rocks and throw them, waiting for them to explode and pour out birds and rivers. He talked for days with angels who danced on the heads of pins, patiently explaining to him how many others of their kind danced along with them. He sat on words, turned them over, threw them at one another. He walked underneath signs and stared at the letters so hard he thought they would fall off. Banging the rocks against his head he tried to press the poetry into his brain, tried to press the stone logic that sat on the membrane of the rock. The angels told him to dress profusely, which he did, as if the very idea of clothing was an anointment, as if pants and shirts were benediction. I used to be a noun, he thought, now I am a verb. He met a beautiful girl and wanted to give her the fish that was swimming through his body, the fish that was swimming in his blood, and he wanted to give her the bird that was in his body, the bird that flew through his chest and he told her he could give her both of these great gifts, these magnificent gifts, these unique gifts, through a hole in his penis, but that he had to place the penis inside her body to make sure the fish would not swim away into the night air and to make sure that the bird would not fly towards the sunshine but that both fish and bird would remain inside her body, growing, until the time when they would be set free and climb towards the sun. That would be magnificent, he thought, and shuddered, thinking that the very splendor of it frightened him, that it was a bronze thought, a copper thought, perhaps a gold thought, that his body was not sufficient to contain the reflected shimmer of these metals. Great things can happen inside me, he explained to the girl. Then, with an immense weariness, he looked at his hands, as if he expected them to speak, as if his fingernails were tongues, his thumbs a mouth. He rolled on the ground. He picked up his foot and looked at his toes. He did not want to be understood, or misunderstood. He waited for an emotion, regretting that he had no anger. It is time to be honest, time to speak about this, he said. Some of his classmates thought he was the devil. You have wings, they said. No

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I don't, he said, showing them the scars on his back and sides where the wings used to be. He told them to feel his head; I have no horns, I have no tail he said, lowering his pants. But something inside him twisted and turned.

III.

He enrolled at the Sorbonne and majored in biology and botany, refusing to speak French, though he understood it, and replying in Spanish and Latin. He collected plants, and never went anywhere without a suit and a tie. He grew plants in the pockets of his suits. He raced a coach and four through the streets of Paris, whipping the horses to a frenzy. I love animals, he said, explaining his mistreatment of the horses. He drank prodigious amounts of liquor and was able to pass out on his feet and quote villanelles spontaneously while unconscious, though his body was conscious and functioning. He made love in the same fashion. Inside I am a flame, he said. Inside I do not know who I am. Inside I am someone else. He was very tall, larger than the bed he slept in. He no longer saw stones splitting apart. He told this to his classmates, who were disappointed, and then uninterested. People react differently to me, he thought; sometimes they are there, sometimes not. You are a Spanish terror, a French girl told him in bed. She stroked his hair, which was changing colors, and ran her fingers along the scars that used to be wings, and kept touching his claw. What does one do with a claw? she asked. He fought duels, hurt someone, may have killed him, was expelled from school. When confronted with his dueling, he said, it wasn't me. But we saw you, they said, with the foil in your hand. I know, he said, but it wasn't me. I lunged, but it wasn't me. He slept in cafes. People brought him mirrors to polish. He wrote poetry about plants and birds. He made love on his back, looking straight up, amazed.

IV.

You need the love of a beautiful woman, said a beautiful

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woman one night in the cafe. She was as old as his mother, beautiful beyond words, with a wide handsome face and large lips. There were places in her body that he longed to be. She smelled of mountains, stones, the sky. She wrapped him in scarves. She held him in her hand. She called him her tiny thing, her button, the bud on her flower. Put flowers in me, she said. She told fortunes, had a crystal ball that looked like his mind, and from her bed, wrapped in scarves and sheets, the hair on his body combed every morning by her patient hands, he watched the rain pelt the tiny panes of glass, wavy in the lead, in her window and across the street he could see the slate roofs glisten in the wet and the bits of stone that wore off and went clattering across the roof, falling in the street. He tried to dream in her bed. He could not. A part of him was asleep, would not be awakened in sleep. She told him to forget about dreaming; she wrapped him in perfume and her legs, whispered worms in his ears and used her tongue to draw vines on his body which grew every day and held him to her bed. Stay here forever, she said. She combed his hair with her fingers and blew on his toes, a hot icy breath that made his toenails curve over. One night he woke, dreamless, to see her perched on the windowsill, the window open, her great haunches as wide as a cave, a huge cat staring at her from the roof. Though it was raining and the slate roof was slippery, she hunched over, on hands and knees, and crawled out to the cat. He got up and left. His hair had turned gold. That night, sleeping on a park bench, he had a dream. There are two of me, he said, one of them dreams, one of them doesn't. From his bench he could see the woman crawling across the roof. Her hips were as wide as a chair. He was young and strong, and someday would be neither. His claw had grown, he thought.

V.

He sold dry ice on the street corners to people who thought it would cure warts and slept in the park that was shaped like the hips of a fat woman. The ice burned anything it touched.

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It disappeared by smoking. Every night he had a dream which he forgot as soon as he woke up. The smell of the dream, the strong, pungent odor of what happened to him in the night during his dreaming stayed with him all day, until the next night, when he dreamt again, and a new odor was added to the one he already remembered, pushing back the first, almost out of his mind, but not quite. During the cold foggy days he sold umbrellas and small expensive leather gloves that had the tips of the fingers cut off. He pickled the eyes of fish and sold them as charms, collected the claws of cats and strung them into bracelets. At times he was cold and lonely and scratching himslf with his claw he reminded himself of the time when his mother thought he could fly, thought that his fins were wings. He was waiting for the miraculous. He did not know how it would come, but he knew it would come, probably on the wings of a bird or the fins of a fish. One evening the sunset amazed him. Dozens of black birds flew across the startled orange and purple of the sky. I must wait some time for the miraculous, he thought. Perhaps it will never come. Perhaps my waiting is a dream, and the miraculous too is a dream that never comes and that I am trapped in a bed that holds me with vines drawn by a beautiful woman with her tongue. One can wait a long time for the miraculous. Years passed.

VI.

He was taller than he had ever been. His hair was red. He was strong, but sad. He worked as a strong man in the circus. Lifting heavy weights, dozens of anvils, a donkey, two safes, the fat lady with arms the size of cannon barrels, his fins grew back. They were tiny things, hardly bumps, small mounds of scales which he covered with blacking powder and several shirts. His claw had grown, was quite sharp, and could be bent forwards or backwards. He could bend iron, and crack a single walnut in his hand. He liked to toss things in the air, as high as he could, and secretly hoped that they would never come down, that the blue up there was stickum, a sludge of glue that held stars and planets, the moon and comets, and all

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things that left the earth. He walked around with his head up and frightened people, refusing to look down. I am waiting for something, he said, the miraculous. Its up there. Beyond us. He grabbed stones and cocked his arm, pitching them far into the sky, watching them try to flee the earth. People complained about rocks falling from the sky, and the owner of the circus told him that he would have to fire him. But I am waiting for the miraculous, he said. People aren't interested in strength, anymore, the owner said. They've got machines to do that. They like flabby arms. It's a fad, but what can I do. The lion tamer, who the day before had been disappointed because he could not afford a silver and teak walnut-cracker, invited him to his table, promising a job cracking walnuts, with the proviso that he wear a heavy silver and pine cape the animal trainer had worn years before when he first began to chastise cats. After the meal the trainer went to his taming, and his wife sat at the table slowly opening and closing her mouth. She was a low, wide woman, with a long mouth and eyes the color of silkworms. She was able to reach up and pull her eyelashes down to her navel, stretching them like elastic, and then returning them to their original length. She made a lewd motion with her hands, and dragged him to the lion tamer's bed. After whipping the cats, the tamer came back to his trailer and found him on top of his wife. He whipped him on the back, cutting deeply, and made a bloody mess of the black bumps. He was thrown out of the circus, and found work sharpening knives, waiting for the miraculous. A man who sold sugar water told him it would be a long time. And besides, he said, how would you know if it came? What does it look like? Anyway, he said, it hardly ever happens. And when it does, it will burn you up, mark my words. He moved to a dark city in central Europe where the air smelled of coal. He wore a dark suit that was too small for him in the back and put charcoal under his eyes so he would look like the city's inhabitants. He sold newspapers and juggled bowling pins. Once he tossed a pin so high it took a week for it to come down. He watched the sun set six times, but never once saw

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a flock of black birds flash across the muddy purples and magentas in the sky.

VII.

Suppose the miraculous will never come, he thought. If it never is, if it is an empty hole, I want to be magnificent. He returned to school and became a botanist. Stroking the leaves of plants made him feel lighter than air, made him feel transparent, exalted. His hair turned to gold and he slept with his eyes open. He dreamed when he was awake. The part that was inside himself turned again, twisting slightly, complaining about his behavior. Teach me a trick, it said, he said, he speaking to himself. Sing to me, dance with me, make me splendid, make me magnificent. He caught twenty blackbirds and put them all in a cage and taught them to speak. They spoke Latin, confused the priests and caused much consternation in the church. Then, in a tremendous display of will, he taught the birds to forget. This he considered a greater feat than teaching them to talk, and he bragged about it all day and night in a cafe where they sold green tincture of iodine as a preventive against mushrooms growing on the penis. No one cared about his great act of will. Even he himself, and the he inside himself, became lackadaisical about it, as if it were a trick, an indulgence, a thing that someone with flabby arms would do. He sighed, and in a fit of anger let his hair become green and opened a garage to sell motorcars and became rich. He wore three and sometimes four suits at once, and when he became richer yet he wore more suits, sometimes appearing dressed in ten or twenty of the most expensive suits he could find, made from linens, silks, and imported wools woven in factories filled with fog situated near craggy seacoasts. He drove as many motorcars as he could, and had them yoked together with special controls so he could drive five or ten of them at once down broad avenues, turning corners very slowly, like steamships caught in a canal, or condors slowly revolving around a tether. Drinking six different champagnes at once, wearing twenty suits, each a different color but all resplendent, driving five

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cars in a special yoke, he tried to make love to four different women at once, and being unable to, halted his cars and ripped his clothes. Is this being magnificent, he wondered? Does my magnificence incite envy? He looked at the motorcars with their tall spoked wheels and wondered if he had such wheels inside himself. He wanted to stand on the running board of his motorcar and give a speech. But the words were full of wings and left him as soon as he opened his mouth, and he quickly shut his mouth, lest all the words flee him, and he be left speechless, wordless, an anonymous alphabet. I ache, he thought. I want to speak but I can't. Even the me inside me wants to speak, wants to be human.

VIII.

Forty now, maybe sixty, perhaps something in between, his hair was streaked with grey and green, gold and red. His eyes burned. What he didn't know was that his life would stretch on to an immense age, that the years he had now were just a fraction of his final age, though perhaps final was the wrong word. There was a war between himself. He became a linguistic contradiction. The pronoun in himself had spread. What I dream of doing, he said, I have already done, already dreamed, making the dream redundant. He kept thinking he could put himself out for hire, while he himself slept. He looked at his two hands, his two arms, his two legs. Of course, he said, twice. He got two jobs, a day job and a night job, and slept both day and night, in bits and pieces so that his employers would not be alarmed. Patch this thing together, a friend told him. The tip of his ear was removed, and then sewn back on. He shuddered, thinking that what happened to other people might happen to him. He bought handcuffs and chained himself to the heavy anchor chain that served as a railing on the waterfront. I don't want change, he said, let everything stay the same. He thought that the chain was connected to some heavy part of the earth, that it was immutable, that while the earth turned and history revolved, this great chain and the connection it had to the bowels of the earth, this un-

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changing chain, would solidify his being. His head was constantly racing. It felt good to be chained to iron. He could feel the currents flowing through the heavy links of chain and then through his body. A river of iron. I want it to weigh me down, to hold me, to prevent me from moving. Someone came with a chisel and spent long hours cutting him loose. He danced when he was cut loose. A part of me was set free, he said, I can't control it forever. He had pictures of Eng and Cheng pinned up in his room. They're wonderful, they never change, they always have each other. You need these two. He said, I have many ideas, when I yawn they run away, I get burned, so I rarely mention them. I like fire, he thought for a moment. But I hate burning, things burning. I have two mouths to feed. Though final is a word, there is no way to tell if anything about him is final. He has turned sideways in his body, inside his skin. The only way he can get to sleep is to have a woman on either side, and then he dreams of fire, waking up terrified. Stones burn in my dreams, he says. They turn different colors. Things I make with my hands grow. Chairs that I carve blossom into peaches. He whittles wood, and watches cucumbers sprout where he has gouged. What is the mystery in wood, he thinks, that lets it do a thing like this? If it can grow these things, why can it not talk? He put his ear next to the wood to listen. But all he heard were the rivers that flowed inside the wood. He wanted to teach, and stood in front of people hoping he could, but turned sideways in his body he can never face forward, the forward turned sideways, and facing sideways to them he still faces sideways. It is a way of turning the body around in itself, he thinks. There is a car inside him. His body is starting to revolve inside itself, assuming a new planetary system. His head turns inside his head, his eyes are where his eyes were, but turned, angry, burning. He wore tuxedos and smoked cigarettes and was invited to parties by rich people who wanted to touch his claw. We don't have to pretend anything, one of the richest women in the world said. That's what being rich means. He shuddered, terrified for their imagination. Don't, she said, I've paid plenty to lose it. She wanted to lie in bed with him and touch his claw. She thought it

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would make her life longer. She was afraid of death. She liked to look at his penis. She painted the inside of his thighs. Rub me, she said. He shivered. There was nothing magnificent about her, and that frightened him. He told her this, spitting on her hair until she cried. That is good for me, she said, between sobs. He never wore tuxedos again. He read more books than he should have. Years added on to years. He changed tires on cars that hung from the ceiling. He told no one about his former life. This was either before or after one of the large wars. He thought about months whose final letter ended with a vowel.

IX.

What is this "it" thing? What is this pronoun thing? He wanted to know. It was getting close, and yet it was far away. He visits his mother in Paraguay. He is in his nineties. I have killed a man he tells her. I know, she says. I am embarrassed by my age, she says, but now that I have seen you I will die. Because you have killed, she adds, you will live a very long life. That is your punishment. But I wanted the miraculous, he said, and now I think it is too late. Now I must wait for the magnificent. It will be a long wait, his mother said. It may never come. She was very old, and yet she looked sixty, seventy. She moved slowly, with great grace, like a butterfly trapped in oil, and she remembered the time she wrapped him in plantain leaves when it got hot and sprinkled water over him to cool him down, and sang songs to drive away the bugs that crawled over his lips and tried to get inside his mouth when he left it open. She had worked for the same family for all these years, and now that she was old and feeble they had added a room onto the house for her and cared for her the way she had cared for their grandparents and their great-grandparents, and their great-great-grandparents. They had come to love her, not as one of the family, but beyond that. She was a shrine to grace. She was not one hundred pounds, and the young girls came to her so they could learn how to be beautiful. This they did by watching her. She moved little,

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said little, but the young girls of this family were patient, and she taught them beauty by the way she breathed, by the way she lifted her hand and turned her head. Now that her son had arrived she was ready to die, and she did this in stages, as if she had been transported, quite delicately, to another place. Apondé was the tallest one at the funeral. I have been cheated at something, he thought, standing in the rain, crying for his mother. But he did not know what it was. He had white hair, and a firm face that looked young and old at the same time, as if it was playing tricks on itself. The joke is in my body, he thought. A part of me laughs at another part, but there is no part apart from me. Where is the magnificent thing I have been waiting for? Where can it be found?

X.

He landed on Ellis Island and told them he was forty years younger than he was. The immigration official looked at him strangely, and he, in a fit of passion, grabbed the man and held him aloft with one hand. Who but a man of forty years younger than I could do this? he asked. The official agreed, and welcomed him to America. Is this, he thought, the land of the miraculous, or merely the land of the magnificent? He walked in the streets of the new country's largest city, being pushed and shoved, smelling pickles and horse manure. His eyes were clear but his hair burned. The streets were packed with Jews, Irish, Italians, selling, pushing, shouting. "I am Apondé!" he wanted to shout, grimacing, thinking that if he said it loud enough and long enough he would be noticed, admired, paid attention to. Nothing is what it seems here, he said, everything can change. By a tremendous act of will he changed the color of his hair from white to gold and got a job carrying a sign that advertised a moving picture. He learned that the pictures by themselves were motionless, but when passed rapidly in front of a light they moved, they became motion, they became real. It was as if life, light, spirit had been breathed into them. He himself breathed very quickly. The magic of it took his breath away. Soon he was selling tickets,

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then playing the piano, then running the projector, and then he ran errands for the men who made the pictures, getting them things that no one else could get: animals that could run backwards and stones that would explode. He painted scenery and carried props and put the cards that held the words in front of the camera. He suggested words for the cards, and helped the director with an idea. He said very little, but people seemed to guess what he would say, or else wanted to help him say what they knew he would say. Everyone else spoke fast, and he noticed that the slower he spoke the more people paid attention to him. When he hardly spoke at all they hovered around him. They let him make a movie. He noticed someone who walked funny and kept knocking over things. He made a movie about a man trying to buy a shirt, getting instead a black eye. People laughed. The movie made money. He made another movie about a man trying to paint the ocean because he didn't like the color of water. That too made money. He made a bigger one that made more money and then moved west when everyone else did. He made a huge movie with thousands of horses and mountains that exploded and women who danced in gauze and many people in the country went to see it. He bought a big house in Beverly Hills with many servants who made him so mad he fired them. He was richer than he had ever been, even richer than when he sold motor cars from the garage. He was afraid of all the money he was making; there was something about it that reminded him of spiders and scorpions, so whenever he made money he exchanged it for something else, another twelve-cylinder car or a house with a pool that could hold a dozen elephants or a sable and diamond floor-length coat that was sewn with gold thread. He drank a dozen bottles of champagne a day along with three quarts of brandy. He shot arrows at dogs and turned a garden hose on cats he trapped in his house. He made a nine-hour movie about Greed that cost three million dollars. This must be miraculous, he said afterwards when he looked at the movie, which no one in the country would come to see. After that he got a job as a butler and sat on the pier that went into the ocean and watched the magenta sunset, waiting for

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blackbirds to scoot across the sun before it dipped into the purple water. I am too old, he thought. No one will believe how old I am. It is a miracle. It is magnificent. He looked at his yellowing hands and his brownish claw which he could still bend forwards and backwards, though not as far as he used to. He reached around his back to feel the scars where fins and wings had been and thought, now with the fins having disappeared perhaps there is a fish inside me. He would swim. He would live in the sea. He would eat fish. He bragged to one of his actresses who was half his age that he knew much about cars and she hired him as her chauffeur. He drove her daughter around Los Angeles in a big Isotta Fraschinni. She was thirty five years old and had black hair that fell to the cleft between her buttocks and they drove around the city in the huge black car, a car that was silent as stone, as powerful as a mountain, with glass windows that could stop a machine gun bullet. She asked him why he was so old. He told her, and they stopped on the side of a mountain overlooking the city and made love in the back seat of the gigantic car, putting their feet on the jump seats. I see colors around you, she said when he was inside her. She had a baby, not a bird, as he had once thought it would be many years ago when he felt that inside him was the love dust of dozens of eagles, but a fully formed child, with yellow hair, who had no fins on his back or even the beginnings of fins, and also had the regulation ten fingers and ten toes. When he saw the baby he looked at his hands, as if he expected them to catch on fire, or thought his hands belonged to someone else, that he had only borrowed them for the moment. They drove into the desert and stopped when he saw some rocks he thought would explode. Why are you stopping here, she asked. It is the noise of the place, he said. There is no noise. Someone is calling, he said. They camped in a tent, he sang to the baby to keep bugs out of its eyes and repaired cars in the nearest town to buy groceries. The mother of his child explored his body as if she were parched and had stumbled upon an oasis. What is this, and this, she kept asking, and he explained how he had gotten this scar or that cut, and she wanted to know about all the marks on his

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body, how he used his claw, what it felt like to have a claw, how he could change the color of his hair, and why he was so old. I'm not sure, he said, perhaps it is because someone lives inside me, and he is much younger, he will go on for a long time after me, but he turns his head inside mine, and sometimes I wonder where we are going, we, both of us, pushing in different directions. It is truly amazing, she said, smelling his arm. Is it, miraculous, he asked? She put her tongue on his elbow. He shivered. I wouldn't call it that, she said. She had large but weakly supported breasts that hung loosely from her shoulders and swayed when she walked. They were lying naked in the tent to escape the desert heat. She moved towards him, like the wind, and he could feel her hair dancing on his chest and the sweet smell of licorice on her breath. There are things inside me, he said, would you call them magnificent? She shook her body, moving it like a tide sweeping over the beach, hugging rocks. No, she said. It is something else. It has those things in it, but it is something else. She rolled over him, a liquid, clouds, the wind on a hill, leaving him breathless, close to death. She rubbed her skin on his. She was a storm, his lightning. She flowed over him like waves, like a froth-flecked whitecap, and he could feel the depth of her ocean. I wonder what it is, he said. You are so old, she said, so old, moving her legs, crossing and then uncrossing one leg over the other, but we will have time to find out.

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Christopher Logue

from The Iliad, *the opening lines of the first book*

Until we part, my reader, put
What is called reality aside.
Instead,
Picture a ten foot wall made of wattled reeds
Faced with red clay and split by a double doored gate.
See a naked man half-walk half-trot past its guard,
And, having vanished from their sight,
Run with what seems to crack the speed of light
Across a mile of dry, then damp, then sand invisible
Beneath wrist deep waves that glide
Over each other's luminescent panes,
Then kneel in them, beggar his arms, and pray:

"Out of humiliation, Source, I cry,
Source, hear my voice, and with your presence
Bless my ultimatum."

The sea is as quiet as light.
His voice flows on:

"God is your debtor, Source.
Never in Heaven or on earth
Has he denied that you, while single still,
Saved his divinity from oblivion.
"And all in Heaven—and all but one on earth—
Admit he promised. If I, your only child,
Chose to die young, by violence, alone,
Of those with honour, mine, and mine alone,

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Should be the best, the best of all the best,
The most astonishing that fame shall light,
Now, or in perpetuity.
"And so I choose. Nor have I changed. But now—
By which I mean, today, this instant, *now*—
That Lord and God, the Shepherd of the Clouds,
Sees me humiliated through the camp
Surely as if he sent a hand to herd
The army into one, and then, before its eyes,
Painted my face with Trojan excrement."

Sometimes
Before divinities appear
Something is marked:
A noise; a note, perhaps; perhaps
A change of temperature, or even, as now,
The fragrance of abyssal stock, that
As it drew his mind, drew from the seal-coloured sea
A mist that moved like weed, that stood, then first became
His mother, Thetis', son-besotted face,
Her fingers next, that lift his chin,
That smooth his long red-lit-with-yellow hair,
Her words:
"Why tears, Achilles?"
Then her pause. And then:
"Rest in my arms and answer from your heart."

"A month ago," Achilles said,
"I killed the men and stripped the town of Pharan.
Among its valuables were ten Abydian mares
And 30 fertile women. As is required,
The latter reached the beachhead touchless,
Were handed to the heralds' men, and then,
Soon after sunrise of the following day,
Led to the common sand for distribution.
"And then, dear mother, there he came,
Our leading king, majestic Agamemnon,

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Autarch of Argos, Atreus' eldest son,
Lord of both mainland and of island Greece,
His face emerging from his lionskin's mouth,
His forehead tickled by its teeth, crossed forepaws on his chest,
And in his hands the solar mace, the mace that stands for—
As I understood—what is required of Greek by Greek.
"Then walking through—
Nods left, nods right, but always walking on—
"'Those culled by acclamation when we best
Answer the heralds': 'Who is owed? Is owed?'
He dallied through the fold of captive shes,
Here sniffing, pinching here, lifting a lip, a lid,
Asking his brother:
'One, Menelaos, or... Or two?' And then,
Scanning their anxious faces with his own,
Paramount Agamemnon lifts the mace
As if it were a mop, and with its gold,
Egg-ended butt selects—before the owed—
A gently broken 15-year-old she
Who came—or so it seemed—from plain but prosperous ground."

"First king, first fruit," his mother said.
"Will you hear more, or not?" Achilles said.
"Dear son..." she said.
"Then do not interrupt."

The moon looks down. The stars move on.

"Her name was Cryzia.
In looks quite like Briseis—
Whose father's guest she was the day we struck.
"Less than a week
After she went through Agamemnon's gate,
Her father, Cryzez of Cape Tolomon,
The archpriest of Apollo's Pharan sanctuary,

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Came to the beachhead, up, between the ships,
Holding before him, outright, with both hands,
A polished rod adorned with streams of wool
Blest by and consecrated to That Lord of Light.
"Pausing an instant by the beak of Lord Odysseus' ship,
He reached the centre of the common sand
And, with the crimson streamers blowing past his face,
Waited until its bowl and bank were packed,
Then offered all the Greeks, but principally
King Agamemnon and his queenless brother,
Two shiploads of amphorae filled with Macedonian wine,
200 Rhodian donkeys, harnessed and basketed,
2000 spearheads, and their weight in iron
To have his daughter back, plus these gloved words:

'Lord of both mainland and of island Greece,
May God Almighty grant that you, and those who follow you,
Strip and demolish Troy before you sail safe home.
'Only accept my gifts and free my child;
So tendering your mercies to God's son,
Apollo, Lord of Light.'

"Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! the army cried,
And yes to them—but to ourselves—the lords.
You would have thought the matter done.
The gifting, well above what is required;
Himself—plus fifty if he is a day—has had,
Or has presented, or released for general use,
A dozen dozen as attractive such.
But no.
"Before the fourth yes died into the sky
Our king of kings began:
'As my reply affects you all,
Restrain your yessings.'
"And when we did: 'If,' he went on,
Then stopped, then turned to Cryzez: 'If,
When I have finished what I am about to say,

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I find you loitering with intent about this fleet
Ever again, then, taking you with one
And in my other hand your so-called holy rod,
You may be certain I shall thrash your back
To bloody pulp.
'As for your child:
Bearing by night my body in my bed,
Bearing by day my children on her knee,
As far from Tolomon as you from hope,
If by some chance her eyes resee this coast
Her smile will show a pair of empty gums.
'Be safe—begone. And do not come again.' "
Fearful as a toad in a python's mouth,
Gray as his close cropped hair, Apollo's priest,
As if the world was empty, crawled and clawed
Beside the loudmouth overtoppling sea,
Eating the sand, spitting the sand towards the camp,
Then standing, wetted, in the sodium light
To pray:

"Master of Light
Whose reach makes distance myth
In whose abundant warmth
The vocal headlands of Cape Tolomon bask,
If ever I enriched your leafy shrine
If ever my diurnal holocausts
Sweetened your timeless rites
Vouchsafe me this:
For every hair
Now growing on my daughter's head
Let ten Greeks die."

Barely a pace
Above the Mediterranean's dim edge
Mother and son.
And as she asks: "He did?" and hears: "He did."
Their voices fade.

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Quite late at night, when, having parked, you stand
Just for a moment in the chromey dark,
Occasionally it seems that, some way off,
Beyond the river, or the tower belt, say,
The roofs show black on pomegranate red,
As if, below their line, they stood in fire;
And should the clouds be bolstered low,
Red shadows pulse across their undersides
Even as you climb your steps and close your door.

Lights not dissimilar to these were seen
By those who looked from Troy towards the fleet
After Apollo answered Cryzez' prayer.

Taking a corner of the east Aegean sky
Between his index finger and his thumb,
Out of its blue he cracked
Then zephyr ferried in among the hulls
A generation of infected mice.
Such fleas!
Such bites!
See Greece begin to die...

Busy in his delirium, watch Pyra'gan
(A sling from rainy Thessalonica)
As he comes forward, hit—it seems—
By a stray stone, yet still comes on
Though coming now as if he walked a plank,
Then falling off it into nothingness.
Take 20, dead in file,
Their tongues extruded, collared with grey fur,
And with them, carried to the pits, so many more
It seemed that half incinerated half,
And so the cremators polluted Heaven.

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Nine days of this. And on the tenth, Ajax,
As grim beneath his tan as Rommel after Alemain
Summoned the army to the common ground,
Raised his five-acre voice, and said:
"Dear Friends,
Hear what my head is saying to my heart.
"Within a week
The Trojans or the plague will finish us.
So let us ask our priest to ask his god
Why we are so detestable to Heaven.
If it is empty altars, or bad prayers,
Then let him say so.
"High smoke from altar stones might alter it."

He sits.
Their quietude assents.
Ajax is loved. I mean it, he is *loved*.
His hands are large as buckets. Not a soul,
Including Thetis' boy, is braver than
This giant king from Salamis.

And in the quietude,
Calchas, the army's auger, rose,
And with the cautious bow of one who sees
Is, was, and will, as easily as other men the moon,
Said:
"The Lord of Light finds Greece abominable."

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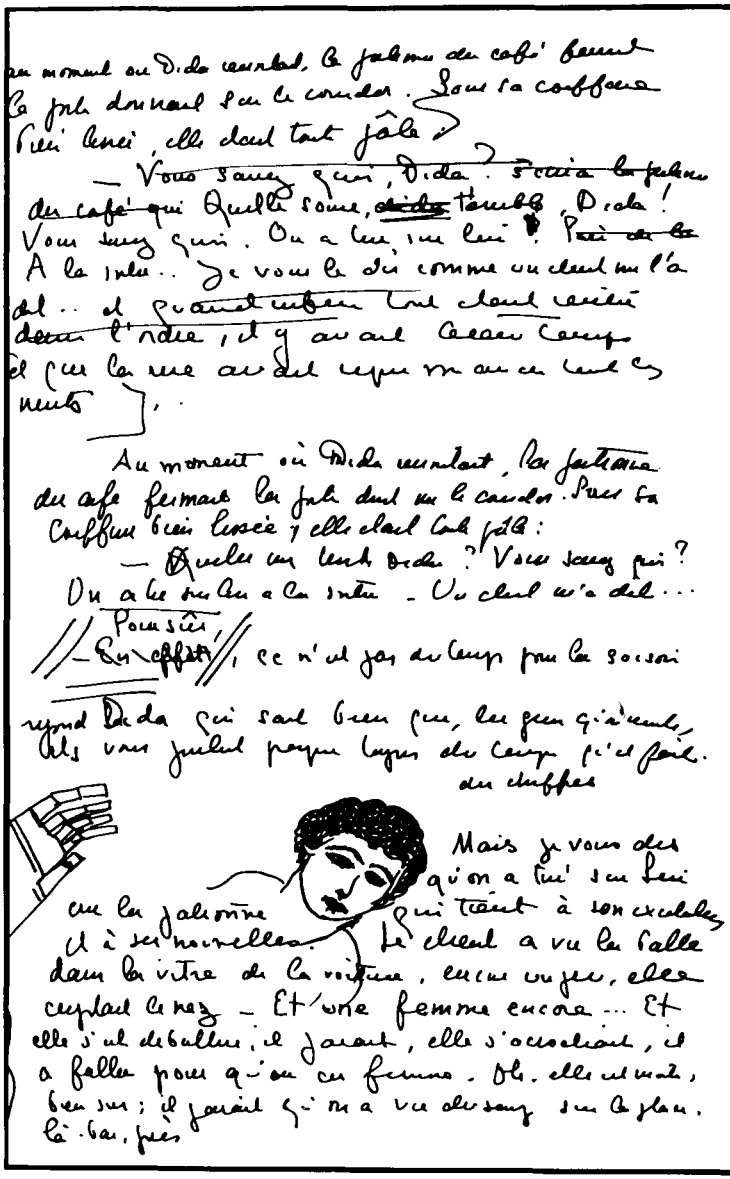

A manuscript page from Marguerite Yourcenar's novel A Coin in Nine Hands.

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The Art of Fiction CIII

Marguerite Yourcenar

I had an appointment with Marguerite Yourcenar on Saturday, November 14, 1987 at her hotel in Amsterdam. I was told that she had not arrived, that several people had been looking for her, including her driver, and that no one knew where she was. Further telephone calls to her home in Maine and to her publishers in Paris revealed that she had had a slight stroke and was recovering, and that there was no cause for concern. She did not recover, and died on December 18th. She was eighty-four.

I had first interviewed her on April 11th in London and

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later sent her the typescript for corrections. It had come back with a good deal of amendment, carefully written on the text and on separate sheets of paper. I was grateful that she had taken so much trouble over it, but she was still not quite satisfied and wanted to see me again, go through it with me and make sure that everything was exactly as she intended. I was happily anticipating our meeting in Amsterdam, but it was not to be. The following introduction was written after our meeting in London. I have left it in the present tense.

Marguerite Yourcenar has the ardent imagination and clear, intense blue eyes of her Flemish ancestors. The rich, many-colored subtlety of her great novels—Memoirs of Dadrian, The Abyss, Alexis, Coup de Grace, *and others—is reminiscent of their intricate tapestries, while her sublime mystical appreciation of Nature and its beauty evokes the golden age of landscape painting in the Low Countries. For years she has been considered one of France's most distinguished and original writers; yet it was not until 1981, when she was the first woman ever to "join the Immortals" and be elected to the French Academy in the four hundred years of its existence, that she was discovered by the general public.*

Marguerite Yourcenar was born in 1903 into a patrician Franco-Belgian family. (Yourcenar is an anagram of her real name à particule, *de Crayencour.) Her mother died of puerperal fever shortly after her birth, and she was brought up by her father, a great reader and traveler, who taught her Latin and Greek and read the French classics with her. They lived in various European countries and she learned English and Italian as well.*

She published two volumes of poetry in her teens, "which are frankly oeuvres de jeunesse *and never to be republished." Her two novellas,* Alexis *and* Coup de Grâce, *appeared in 1929 and 1939 respectively, during which time she lived mostly in Greece, and won her critical acclaim. In 1938 she met Grace Frick in Paris, who later "admirably translated" three of her major books. When the war came in 1939 and she could not return to Greece, she was offered hospitality in the USA by*

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Grace Frick, "since she had not the means of living in Paris." To support herself, she took a teaching job at Sarah Lawrence College. She also began to write her masterpiece, Memoirs of Hadrian, *which was published in 1954.*

In 1950 Yourcenar and Frick bought a house in Mount Desert Island, off the coast of Maine, where they lived between long journeys abroad. Grace Frick died in 1979 after a long illness, but Marguerite Yourcenar still lives there, though she continues to travel extensively.

Her latest book, Two Lives and a Dream, *was published recently in England, and she is now working on* Le Labyrinthe du Monde, *completing the autobiographical triptych which began with* Souvenirs Pieux *and* Archives du Nord. *She has just written a long essay on Borges—a lecture given recently at Harvard.*

Marguerite Yourcenar's intellectual vigor and curiosity are still prodigious, despite age and an open-heart operation two years ago. She has just translated James Baldwin's The Amen Corner *and Yukio Mishima's* Five Modern No Plays *into French, from the original Engish and Japanese, helped for the latter by her friend J.M. Shisagi, Mishima's executor. She was in London briefly for the publication of* Two Lives and a Dream, *and this interview took place at her hotel in Chelsea. She was elegantly dressed in black and white and spoke an exquisite French, with a markedly patrician accent, in a deep, mellifluous tone.*

INTERVIEWER

You have just spent the day in Richmond; was it just to walk in the beautiful park there or for some other reason?

MARGUERITE YOURCENAR

Well, it had to do with the book I am writing at the moment, which is a book built entirely of memories, and in the present chapter I evoke the fourteen months I spent in England when I was twelve and we lived in Richmond. But where exactly I can't recall. I saw dozens of little houses in as many streets, all looking alike, with tiny gardens, but I couldn't tell

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which one was ours. It was during the first and second years of World War I, which unlike the Second World War did not drop from the sky in England—there were no bomb alerts or blitzes. I used to go for long walks in Richmond Park on fine days and to museums in London when it rained. I saw the Elgin Marbles at the British Museum and went to the Victoria and Albert frequently. I used to drop my sweet wrappings in a porcelain dragon there—I bet they're still there!

INTERVIEWER

What is your new book to be called?

YOURCENAR

The French title is *Quoi? L'Eternité*, which is from a poem of Rimbaud's: *"Quoi? L'Eternité, elle est retrouvée."* The book is the third volume of my memoirs. The other two are being translated into Engish at the moment. There are certain words one can't translate literally, and one has to change them. For example the first volume is called *Souvenirs Pieux* in French, and I have translated it as *Dear Departed*, which conveys the same nuance of irony. The second volume is called *Archives du Nord*, but "the North" in another language evokes a different image: in England the North refers to Manchester, or even Scotland; in Holland it is the Fresian Isles, which has nothing to do with the North of France. So I have changed it completely, and taken the first line of a Bob Dylan song—"Blowin' in the Wind." I quote the song inside as an epigraph: "How many roads must a man walk down/Before you can call him a man?" It is very beautiful, don't you think? At least it defines well my father's life, and many lives. But to come to the present volume, I don't think *"Quoi? L'Eternité"* would work in English, and we will have to find another title. Among the Elizabethan poets there must be quantities of quotations about eternity, so I think I might find something there.

INTERVIEWER

Let's go back to the beginning. You were very close to your father. He encouraged you to write and he published your first

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poems. It was a limited edition and I believe is now unobtainable. What do you think of them in retrospect?

YOURCENAR

My father had them published at his own expense—a sort of compliment from him. He shouldn't have done—they were not much good. I was only sixteen. I liked writing, but I had no literary ambitions. I had all these characters and stories in me, but I had hardly any knowledge of history and none of life to do anything with them. I could say that all my books were conceived by the time I was twenty, although they were not to be written for another thirty or forty years. But perhaps this is true of most writers—the emotional storage is done very early on.

INTERVIEWER

This relates to what you once said, that "Books are not life, only its ashes." Do you still believe that?

YOURCENAR

Yes, but books are also a way of learning to feel more acutely. Writing is a way of going to the depth of Being.

INTERVIEWER

From your father's death in 1929 to 1939 you only published two novellas, *Alexis* and *Coup de Grâce*, which you said were based on people you knew. Who were they?

YOURCENAR

My father loved an extraordinary woman, exceedingly free in her private life yet of an almost heroic morality. She chose to remain with her husband though her real attraction was for a man who was *Alexis*. As for *Coup de Grâce*, I can now tell you that Sophie is very close to me at twenty, and Eric, the young man ardently attached to her own brother whom she falls in love with, was someone I knew, but political problems separated us. Of course one never knows how close fictional characters are to real people. At the beginning of my memoirs

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I say, "*L'être que j'appelle moi*"—the person I call myself—which means that I don't know who I am. Does one ever?

INTERVIEWER

Next came *Memoirs of Hadrian* which was immediately hailed as a masterpiece and became a bestseller all over the world. Why did you choose the historical novel as a genre?

YOURCENAR

I have never written a historical novel in my life. I dislike most historical novels. I wrote a monologue about Hadrian's life, as it could have been seen by himself. I can point out that this *treatise-monologue* was a common literary genre of the period and that others besides Hadrian had done it. Hadrian is a very intelligent man, enriched by all the traditions of his time, while Zenon, the protagonist of *The Abyss* (*L'Oeuvre au Noir*) is also very intelligent and in advance of his time—indeed of all other epochs too—and is defeated at the end. Nathanaël, the hero of the third panel, *Two Lives and a Dream*, is by contrast a simple, nearly uneducated man who dies at twenty-eight of tuberculosis. He is a sailor at first who becomes shipwrecked off the coast of Maine in America, marries a girl who dies of T.B., travels back to England and Holland, marries a second time a woman who turns out to be a thief and a prostitute, and is finally taken up by a wealthy Dutch family. For the first time he comes into contact with culture—listens to music, looks at paintings, lives in luxury. But he keeps a clear head and sharp eyes, because he knows that while he is listening to music in the hospital, opposite his house men and women are suffering and dying of disease. Eventually he is sent away to an island in the North and dies in peace, surrounded by wild animals and nature. The question is: how far can one go without accepting any culture? The answer is, for Nathanaël, very far, through lucidity of mind and humility of heart.

INTERVIEWER

You met Grace Frick, who later translated *Hadrian*, in 1938. Did you move to the States straight away?

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YOURCENAR

At first only for a few months. I was living in Greece then, in Athens. I came to Paris for a visit and the War broke out. I could not go back to Greece and had no money to live in Paris. Grace, with infinite kindness, asked me to come to America for a while. I thought it would be for six months, but there I still am!

INTERVIEWER

What made you choose Mount Desert Island?

YOURCENAR

We had a friend who was a Professor of Theology at Yale. In 1940 he took a house in Maine while he was on sabbatical, and asked his friends to come and stay. Grace and I went to visit him, and thought that it would be nice to have a house in this still (then) peaceful island. Grace went all over the villages on horseback and became known as "the lady who is looking for a house"! There were luxury houses, sort of chalets for millionnaires, or village houses with no facilities, and nothing in between. We finally bought a simple house and modernized it, putting in central heating and a few other amenities. Did you know that Mount Desert was discovered by the French sailor and explorer Champlain? His ship developed some trouble and he had to stay there for a while to have it repaired. He named it Mount Desert, but alas it is now anything but deserted, and in summer boatloads of tourists pour in from everywhere.

INTERVIEWER

One striking aspect of your work is that nearly all your protagonists have been male homosexuals: Alexis, Eric, Hadrian, Zenon, Mishima. Why is it that you have never created a woman who would be an example of female sexual deviance?

YOURCENAR

I do not like the word homosexual, which I think is dangerous—for it enhances prejudice—and absurd. Say "gay" if you must. Anyway, homosexuality, as you call it, is not the

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same phenomenon in a man as in a woman. Love for women in a woman is different from love for men in a man. I know a number of "gay"men, but relatively few openly "gay" women. But let us go back to a passage in *Hadrian* where he says that a man who *thinks*, who is engaged upon a philosophical problem or devising a theorem, is neither a man nor a woman, nor even human. He is something else. It is very rare that one could say that about a woman. It does happen, but very seldom; for example the woman whom my father loved was very sensuous and also in terms of her times an "intellectual," but the greatest element of her life was love, especially love for her husband. Even without reaching the high level of someone like Hadrian, one is in the same mental space, and it is unimportant whether one is a man or a woman. Can I say also that love between women interests me less, because I have never met with a great example of it.

INTERVIEWER

But there are writers, like Gertrude Stein and Colette, who have tried to illuminate female homosexuality.

YOURCENAR

I do not happen to like Colette and Gertrude Stein. The latter is completely foreign to me; Colette, in matters of eroticism, often falls to the level of a Parisian concierge. You look for an example of a woman who is in love with another woman, but *how* is she in love? Is it an ardent passion of a few months? Or a bond of friendship over a long period? Or something in between? When you are in love you're in love—the sex of the beloved does not matter very much. What matters is the feelings, emotions, relationships between people.

INTERVIEWER

Nonetheless, having portrayed Hadrian so eloquently, could you have done something similar on, say, Sappho? And you have been very discreet about your own life, with Grace Frick for example.

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YOURCENAR

We must set Sappho aside, since we know next to nothing about her. As for my own life: there are times when one must reveal certain things, because otherwise things could not be said with verisimilitude. For example, as I said, Sophie's story in *Coup de Grâce* is based on a true incident. But I was always, as they say, "more intellectually oriented" than Sophie. And I was not raped by a Lithuanian sergeant, nor lodged in a ruined castle! As for my relationship with Grace Frick, I met her when we were both women of a certain age, and it went through different stages: first passionate friendship, then the usual story of two people living and travelling together for the sake of convenience and because they have common literary interests. During the last ten years of her life she was very ill. For the last eight years she couldn't travel and that's why I stayed in Maine during those winters. I tried to help her til the end, but she was no longer the center of my existence, and perhaps had never been. The same is true reciprocally, of course. But what is love? This species of ardor, of warmth, that propels one inexorably towards another being? Why give so much importance to the genito-urinary system of people? It does not define a whole being, and it is not even erotically true. What matters, as I said, concerns emotions, relationships. But *whom* you fall in love with depends largely on chance.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think the emphasis on the physical, sexual aspect of love is due partly to psychoanalysis? Perhaps this is what Anna Akhmatova meant when she said "Freud ruined literature."

YOURCENAR

Freud turns sexuality into a sort of metaphor, and a metaphor not quite worked out. It seems that he was a great innovator, being the first to speak of sexuality with frankness. But that does not make his theories acceptable. But he did not ruin

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literature—it was not in his power to do so, since literature is a very great thing. And then no one thinks of Freud in terms of his time and circumstances. He came from a poor, orthodox Jewish family, living in a little provincial town. Naturally, as a young professor, he was struck by examples of pleasure in Vienna. As a result he saw the world from this double perspective.

INTERVIEWER

It is not so much his pioneering work as a doctor one questions now, but his philosophic-psychological extrapolations.

YOURCENAR

Quite so. He makes a number of extravagant extrapolations, starting from very limited, restricted and small premises. Hence its attraction for the modern world. But he was the first man to speak about sexuality with sincerity and frankness, when it was still taboo. So everyone was fascinated. But we can now say to him: Thank you for your pioneering effort, but to us it is not a new venture, nor a total discovery. As a great psychologist I prefer Jung. He was sometimes strange, but there was genius in his madness. He was more a poet and had a larger perception of human nature. In his memoirs (*Memories, Dreams and Reflections*) you are often confronted with the mystery of life itself. For example, his mother hatred, so strong that a table breaks itself in two when they are together! A stunning para-psychological episode or a beautiful symbol?

INTERVIEWER

Is it because beyond a certain level the male-female dichotomy is irrelevant to you that you have not been interested in feminism? What has been your relationship to the feminist movement of the last few decades?

YOURCENAR

It does not interest me. I have a horror of such movements, because I think that an intelligent woman is worth an intelligent man—if you can find any—and that a stupid woman is

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every bit as boring as her male counterpart. Human wickedness is almost equally distributed between the two sexes.

INTERVIEWER

Is that why you did not wish to be published by Virago Press in England?

YOURCENAR

I did not want to be published by them—what a *name!*—because they publish *only* women. It reminds one of ladies' compartments in nineteenth-century trains, or of a ghetto, or simply of those basements of restaurants where one is confronted by a door marked *Women* and another marked *Men*. But of course there are social differences, and geographical ones. The Muslim woman is somewhat more restricted. But even there, I have just spent the winter in Morocco, and when I saw women walking arm in arm, going to the *Hammam* (public baths)—a place which is not all like the Turkish baths one imagines through Ingres's pictures, and where any minute one risks one's neck, so slippery it is—well, those women often seem happier than their Parisian or New Yorker sisters. They get a lot out of their friendships. There was a Mughol princess called Jahanara, the daughter of Sultan Jahan, an admirable poet. I have found too little information concerning her, but she was initiated to Sufism by her brother, the admirable Prince Dara, assassinated in his thirties by his brother, the fanatic Aurangzarb. So you see even Muslim women could achieve eminence despite their circumstances, if they had it in them.

INTERVIEWER

Because Sufism liberates them from the rigid confines of Orthodox Islam. There is another Sufi poetess, Rabe'a. She wrote most of her surviving poems with her blood when they opened her veins in a warm bath until she bled to death. At least that's the story. It was a common punishment for heretics then, and Sufis were, on and off, considered heretical.

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YOURCENAR

Jahanara was not murdered, but the Sufi Master who had initiated her and her brother Dara was finally put to death.

INTERVIEWER

Going back to your work, your book *Fires* is a series of monologues written from the point of view of women . . .

YOURCENAR

The impersonal narrator, who writes the small linking sentences, is also evidently a woman, but her reflections on love are genderless. There are three monologues which concern men—Achilles, Petroclus, and Phedros—and with them we are in the world of *Alexis*. On the other hand Phedre, Antigone, Clytemnestra, Sappho, Lena, are women, ranging from supreme greatness (Antigone) to vulgarity (Clytemnestra).

INTERVIEWER

You mentioned once that what you wished to do through your work was to revive *le sense du sacré*. It is a common complaint that today we have lost the sense of the sacred—even those who have greatly contributed to this state of affairs complain about it! Will you expand on it a bit more, in relation to your work?

YOURCENAR

The sacred is the very essence of life. To be aware of the sacred even as I am holding this glass is therefore essential. I mean this glass has a form, which is very beautiful, and which evokes the great mystery of void and plenitude that has haunted the Chinese for centuries. Inside, the glass can serve as a receptacle, for ambrosia or poison. What matters to the Taoists is the Void. And glass was invented by someone we don't know. As I say in *The Abyss*, when Zenon is lying down in his monk's cell, "the dead are far away and we can't reach them, nor even the living." Who made this table? If we tried to find out how every object around us came into being we

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would spend our lives doing it. Everything is too far away in the past, or mysteriously too close.

INTERVIEWER

To what do you attribute this loss of the sacred? Is it due, as some maintain, to the development of capitalism and its corollary, consumerism?

YOURCENAR

Certainly consumerism has a lot to answer for. One lives in a commercialized society against which one *must* struggle. But it is not easy. As soon as one is dealing with the media one becomes their victim. But have we really lost the sense of the sacred? I wonder! Because unfortunately in the past the sacred was intricately mixed with superstition, and people came to consider superstitious even that which was not. For example, peasants believed that it was better to sow the grain at full moon. But they were quite right: that is the moment when the sap rises, drawn by gravitation. What is frightening is the loss of the sacred in human, particularly sexual relationships, because then no true union is possible.

INTERVIEWER

Perhaps this feeling for the sacred is the reason why you are particularly interested in ecology and conservation?

YOURCENAR

It is most important. The Dutch have kindly elected me to their Academy, the Erasmus Institute for the Arts and Letters. Unlike its French counterpart it includes a substantial prize, half of which one has to donate to a charity. I gave mine to the World Wildlife Organization. They protested at first, saying that the Institute was for the promotion of the Arts and Letters, not lions and birds! But I said that I would have to refuse the prize unless I could make my gift, and they accepted. How sincere are the Green and Ecology parties, and how much of it is political posturing, I simply do not know. But something has to be done before it is too late. It is almost

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too late already, with the acid rain destroying Europe's forests and the defoliation of the tropical forests in South America.

INTERVIEWER

Talking about the Academy, you were the first woman in four hundred years to be elected to the French Academy. How did it happen? I ask this because traditionally one must make an application and go canvassing with other members. One reads heart-wrenching letters from past candidates, notably Baudelaire, begging the members to vote for them.

YOURCENAR

Poor Baudelaire! He had greatly suffered from the condemnation of some of his poems, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and membership in the Academy for him could have been revenge. In my case Jean d'Ormesson wrote asking me if I would object to being nominated, without any visit or other effort on my part. I said no, finding it discourteous to refuse. I was wrong. There are a few serious and interesting Academicians; there are also, and always have been, more mediocre choices. Furthermore, the Academy, like the *Figaro*, where most Academicians do write, represents now a more or less strongly rightist group. I am myself neither rightist nor leftist. I did refuse to wear the Academy's uniform—my long black velvet skirt and cape were designed by St. Laurent. And of course I refused the customary gift of the sword. But I received a Hadrian coin from voluntary contributors.

INTERVIEWER

Since your election to the Academy you have become much better known to the general public and lionized by the literary world. Do you mix with the Parisian literary society?

YOURCENAR

I do not know what being lionized means, and I dislike all literary worlds, because they represent false values. A few great works and a few great books are important. They are aside and apart from any "world" or "society."

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INTERVIEWER

I would like to go back again to the early days and talk about your influences. You have been compared to Gide by many people. Was he an influence? For example, they say that Nathanaël, the hero of your *Two Lives and a Dream*, is named after the one in Gide's *Les Nourritures Terrestres*. Is that true?

YOURCENAR

I don't like Gide very much. I find him dry and sometimes superficial. I chose Nathanaël because it is a Puritan name, and he is a young Dutch sailor from a Puritan family. Other members of the family are called Lazarus or Eli for the same reason. They are Biblical names and have no connection with Gide's book. We are very far from the state of happy inebriation presented by Gide in the *Nourritures*, and which is no longer possible in our time, in the face of so much madness and chaos.

INTERVIEWER

But *Alexis* has the form of a Gidian *récit* . . .

YOURCENAR

A *récit* in the form of a letter is an old literary French form. I have said that the gratitude young writers felt for Gide was, to a large extent, because of his use of classical prose forms. But why choose any one in particular? There are hundreds of great books in different languages by which we all are or should be influenced.

INTERVIEWER

Of course, but there are always certain affinities with various writers. Who are they in your case? Baudelaire, Racine, the Romantics?

YOURCENAR

Baudelaire certainly; and some of the Romantics. The French Middle Ages much more, and certain poets of the seventeenth century, such as Ménard, "*La Belle Vieille*," and

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many, many other poets, French and non-French. Racine up to a point, but he is such a unique case that no one can be compared to him.

INTERVIEWER

Except for Britanicus all his protagonists were women: Phedre, Berenice, Nathalie, Roxane, etc. . .

YOURCENAR

Proust had this idea that Racine's Phedre could be identified with a man as well as a woman. But Racine's Phedre is much more French than Greek: you will see it at once if you compare her to the Greek Phedre. Her passionate jealousy is a typical theme of French literature, just as it is in Proust. That is why even in Phedre Racine *had* to find her a rival, Aricie, who is an insignificant character, like a bridal from a popular dress shop. In other words, love as possession, *against* someone. And that is prodigiously French. Spanish jealousy is quite different: it is real hatred, the despair of someone who has been deprived of his/her food. As for the Anglo-Saxon love, well, there is nothing more beautiful than Shakespeare's sonnets, while German love has produced some wonderful poetry too.

INTERVIEWER

I have this theory that the French do not understand Baudelaire and never have. They speak of his rhetoric, yet he is the least rhetorical of poets. He writes like an Oriental poet—dare I say like a Persian poet?

YOURCENAR

Baudelaire is a sublime poet. But the French don't even understand Hugo, who is also a sublime poet. I have—as Malraux also did—taken titles from Hugo's verses: *Le Cerveau Noir de Piranèse*, and others. Whenever I am passing by Place Vendôme in Paris I recall Hugo's poem in which he is thinking of Napoleon, wondering if he should prefer "*la courbe d'Hannibal et l'angle d'Alexandre au carré de César.*" A whole

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strategy contained in one line of Alexandrine! Of course there are times when Hugo is bad and rhetorical—even great poets have their off days—but nonetheless he is prodigious.

INTERVIEWER

Is this what Gide meant when he said: "*Victor Hugo, hélas*"?

YOURCENAR

To have said "*hélas*" is proof of a certain smallness in Gide.

INTERVIEWER

He also rejected Proust's manuscript of *Swann's Way*, saying, "Here is the story of a little boy who can't go to sleep"!

YOURCENAR

We were talking about jealousy: maybe Gide was jealous of Proust; or perhaps he honestly could not like the long and subjective beginning of the *Temps Perdu*. He was not, as we are, cognizant of Proust's whole work.

INTERVIEWER

So who was a decisive influence on you in youth?

YOURCENAR

As I said in the preface to *Alexis*, at the time it was Rilke. But this business of influence is a tricky one. One reads thousands of books, of poets, modern and ancient, as one meets thousands of people. What remains of it all is hard to tell.

INTERVIEWER

You mentioned modern poets. Which ones for example?

YOURCENAR

There is a Swedish poet whom I have never succeeded in introducing to my French friends: Gunnard Ekelof. He has written three little books called *Divans*, I suppose influenced by

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Persian poetry. And, of course, Borges, and some of Lorca's poems, and Pessoa, Apollinaire.

INTERVIEWER

Talking about Borges, what about other South American writers, the whole school of Magical Realism?

YOURCENAR

I don't like them—they are like factory products.

INTERVIEWER

What about the literature of your adopted country, the United States?

YOURCENAR

I'm afraid I haven't read much. I have read a lot of things unconnected with Western literature. At the moment I am reading a huge book by a Moroccan Sufi poet, books on ecology, sagas from Iceland, and so on.

INTERVIEWER

But surely you must have read writers like Henry James, Faulkner, Hemingway, Edith Wharton?

YOURCENAR

Some. There are great moments in Hemingway, for example "The Battler" or, even better, "The Killers," which is a masterpiece of the American short story. It is a tale of revenge in the underworld, and it is excellent. Edith Wharton's short stories seem to me much better than her novels. *Ethan Frome*, for example, is the story of a peasant of New England. In it the protagonist, a woman of the world, puts herself in his place and describes the life of these people in winter, when all the roads are frozen, isolated. It is short and very beautiful. Faulkner brings with him the true horror of the South, the illiteracy and racism of poor whites. As for Henry James, the best definition is the one by Somerset Maugham, when he said that Henry James was an alpinist, equipped to conquer the Himalayas,

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and walked up Beaker Street! Henry James was crushed by his stifling milieu—his sister, his mother, even his brother who was a genius but of a more philosophical and professorial kind. James never told his own truth.

INTERVIEWER

You have just translated *The Amen Corner*, and I know that you admire James Baldwin and are a friend of his. What do you think of his work now?

YOURCENAR

Baldwin has written some admirable pages, but he does not have the courage to go to the end of his conclusions. He should have hit much harder. His life has been hard. He was one of nine children in Harlem, poor, a preacher at fifteen, a runaway at eighteen, working as a laborer, first in the Army during the War and later in the street, earning barely enough to survive. Somehow he gets to Paris where he manages to get himself incarcerated for the crime of having no fixed address and no profession. He has a drink problem now, but many American writers have had problems with drinking; perhaps it is due to the puritanism which has reigned over the American soul for so long. But at the same time, when the Americans are generous, cordial, intelligent, they are somehow more so than the Europeans. I know at least five or six Americans like that.

INTERVIEWER

You are also interested in Japanese literature and your book on Mishima is considered one of the best essays on him. When did you get involved with Japan?

YOURCENAR

My interest in Japanese literature goes back to when I was about eighteen, and first discovered it through certain books. I read Mishima in French when he first appeared and found some of his work very beautiful. Later I saw that a great deal of absurdities were written about him and decided to write my book in order to present a more genuine Mishima. Now they

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have even made a detestable film of his life. Mrs. Mishima went to Hollywood and tried to stop it, but in vain. Four years ago I started learning Japanese, and after a while with the help of a Japanese friend translated Mishima's *Five Modern No Plays* into French. They are beautiful.

INTERVIEWER

Traveling extensively as you do, how do you manage to write? Where do you find so much energy, and what is your work routine?

YOURCENAR

I write everywhere. I could write here, as I am talking to you. When in Maine or elsewhere, when I am traveling, I write wherever I am or whenever I can. Writing doesn't require too much energy—it is a relaxation, and a joy.

INTERVIEWER

Looking back on your life, do you feel that you have had a "good" life, as the expression goes?

YOURCENAR

I don't know what a good life is. But how can one not be sad looking at the world around us at present? But there are also moments when I feel—to use a military expression my father liked—that "it is all counted as leave" (*Tout ça compte dans le congé!*). Happiness sometimes exists.

INTERVIEWER

You are also interested in Sufism, and are planning an essay on Jahanara. What attracts you to it? I am particularly interested because I come from that tradition.

YOURCENAR

It is a philosophy which deals with the Divine as the essence of perfection, which is the Friend, and which the Buddhists seek within themselves, knowing that it comes from themselves, that liberation is from within. But I can't say that I am

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a Buddhist or a Sufi, or a socialist. I don't belong to any doctrine in particular. But there are spiritual affinities.

INTERVIEWER

It seems crass to ask of someone as remarkably youthful and energetic as you are whether you ever think of death?

YOURCENAR

I think about it all the time. There are moments when I am tempted to believe that there is at least a part of the personality that survives, and others when I don't think so at all. I am tempted to see things as Honda does, in Mishima's last book, the one he finished the day he died. Honda, the principal character, realizes that he has been lucky enough to have loved four people, but that they were all the same person in different forms, in, if you like, successive reincarnations. The fifth time he has made a mistake and the error has cost him dearly. He realizes that the essence of these people is somewhere in the universe and that some day, perhaps in ten thousand years or more, he will find them again, in other forms, without even recognizing them. Of course, reincarnation here is only a word, one of the many possible words to stress a *certain* continuity. Certainly all the physical evidence points to our total annihilation, but if one also considers all the metaphysical *données*, one is tempted to say that it is not as simple as that.

—**Shusha Guppy**

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Three Poems by Umberto Saba

Sleeplessness on a Summer Night

I lie down in the grass
under the stars, on
a night that can
make a religious pleasure of my own
dark sleeplessness.
My pillow is a stone.

A dog sits two steps away.
He sits motionless and stares
at a still point, far away.
He seems almost lost in thought,
rapt in a ceremony,
as if the silences of the infinite
pass through his body.

Under such a sky of deepest blue,
on such a starry night,
Jacob dreamed he saw
the angels' ladder stretching from the sky
to his pillow, a stone.
Upon innumerable stars the boy
reckoned the generations he'd beget;
there in that country where he'd fled the hate
of Esau, the stronger one,
an empire unshakable that poured
its riches on his progeny to come;
and the incubus of his dream was the Lord
who wrestled with him.

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The Little Tree

It's raining hard today.
The day is more like night,
the spring is more like fall,
and in the yard a driving wind lays waste
to the little tree that, seeming not to, stands
steady and firm; it seems among the plants
like a too-green adolescent grown too tall.
You watch it. It may be
your pity stirs for all of those white flowers
the north wind strips from it; and they are fruit,
sweet preserves we set
aside for winter, those fallen flowers spread
across the grass. And your vast maternity
aches for them all.

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To My Daughter

My tender little sprout,
I love you not because you are a flower
budding upon my tree, but because you are
so frail and love has given you to me;
you're not the hope of all my dreams; I have
for you, my little daughter, no more love
than I have for every other little seed.

My life, my darling
child,
is a solitary slope, a cliff sealed off
behind a wall,
where at sunset I sit all
alone, with my hidden thoughts in view. You see
those thoughts are at the crest, where you can't be,
so down into your world you make them stray;
and I like to watch you closely, watch the way
you conquer me.

Bit by bit you conquer the whole house,
and your savage mother's heart. When you see her coming
you leave your games behind and you start running
to her, your cheeks enflamed with happiness.
In her lap such a sweet, pure mother gathers you,
and delights in you. And forgets the old love she knew.

—translated from the Italian
by Michael Palma

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Tom Disch

The Dirt and the Willow

All summer long
while other trees
reached for more
light the willow
unfurled streamers
down into its own
streetwise shade
lower and slower
until the silvery
tip of its lowest
leaf had reached
the limit set to
its inverted growth:
dirt's intractable
horizontality

Enough it thought
if willows think
these accretions
are taking me
nowhere
Whereupon
it came to its annual
decision to drop
everything it was
doing and die

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Just try
the dirt wisecracked
not unkindly but
the willow was
aquiver with indignant
self-pity and wouldn't
sit still for such "sitcom
optimism"
It's easy
for tombs to talk
about eternal recurrence
to equate one string
of proteins with another
the wailing child
and the ailing mother
tombs have nothing
to lose o what's the use
you'll never understand

On the contrary said the dirt
that's what I do best
now why don't you just rest

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Florence Elon

Place Not Taken

This pen, like your penis,
stirs in my hand:
those two or three kids
we wanted, never had—
now never will—
locked in it.

And all the things we missed
circle your face
I'll never see again—
mouth opening, to kiss,
to sing in a foreign tongue.

That trip to Sicily
put off another week, a year;
apartment-ringed-with-terraces
we nearly bought three times:

these swarm in memory,
bringing you back to life,
us lying side by side
to have each other, not to hold,
closed in white nets, our canopy.

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William Logan

Haddocks' Eyes

We've received the morning post;
Royal Mail has sent a roast:
Let the ten-pound package lie
open to the blue-tailed fly.

Meat can be indifferent
with the best refrigerant
but decays within a week
and will spoil its physique.

Language functions like a sieve,
stealing what it can't forgive;
words of praise are bittersweet,
consolation indiscreet.

Soon the gosling and the goose
will attempt to reproduce,
and will pardon dead Parnell's
small affairs in grand hotels.

Politics can't save the clerk
shaken by a chance remark,
or console the cows that wait
for the slaughter by the gate,

wait for lovers to disgrace
dinner's intimate embrace
while the lakes of gravy sigh;
frozen in their boats they lie.

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Famine from a satellite
won't disturb the appetite
or condemn the butcher's choice
and the methods he employs.

Diplomats soon learn to curse
border wars they can't rehearse;
generals by night confess
to their love affair with chess

and the tyrant does his part
for the sale of modern art.
In the poker game he plays
teach the losers how to raise.

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Betsy Rosenberg

Bird Song

I wished you awake for the bird song,
Such a sophisticated bird song at five in the morning,
Like a twelve bar blues, each chorus had a variation—
What a bird, I could hardly believe it.
I wished you awake to witness,
Lying restlessly by your side.
It's true I wanted to make love,
But it's true about the bird, believe me.

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Terese Svoboda

The Root of Mother is Moth

At dusklight she slips
into acetate underclothing,
all rustling.
Has she slept
all day? Or is that housedress
draped over the hassock warm? From her motion,
one of submission, her pale arms
upraised, the slip sliding,
talc issues invisibly.

Mother is faceless so far up in the dark.
Just her torso glows,
and the color around her takes on the design
of a falling leaf, grey-yellow plaid.

From the mirror, she draws what little light
there is inside her, and sighs,
But she is really very young
and will think so later.

Now nothing can claim her.
I am quiet, all chrysalis,
hidden in her closet.

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from Shine Hawk

Charlie Smith

That night, lying by the fire under a set of stars that looked so fresh and clean they could have been minted that morning, in the chilly air that carried on its sleek back the sounds of nightbirds and the splash of fish—maybe this far south a gator tail—I watched the two of them sitting across from me, as Frank, snugged behind her broad shoulders, combed out Hazel's hair with slow, gentle strokes. At the river's edge, tipped upside down, the johnboat caught shadows. The woods behind us held a darkness that seemed impenetrable. Jake's coffin rested at the end of its grooved sand wake between the fire and the boat, not even the scorch of lye able to wrest him out of his sleep.

I said, "Do you remember the time you tried to put Jake in the asylum?"

Frank looked up out of the dream state that had begun to come over him more frequently now—the dream writhing in his eyes, pummeling him—and said, "What asylum was that?"

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I threw a stick on the fire which kicked up a small flag of sparks. "That time you took him to Jorie, South Carolina, and he worked the trick on you."

He looked at me with snared eyes. "I took him up to Jorie," he said. "I remember that: Jorie, South Carolina, where they have a water tower shaped like a peach."

"I didn't know that."

Hazel pressed against him, rubbing her back against his chest. All those nights in New York I had teased the picture of her into my mind, longing to bring her alive before me, but terrified to bring her too close lest I tear myself loose from marriage and career and come running like a wild man to beg my way back into her life. Frank scratched the top of his head, twirled the thin foreknot and said, "I haven't thought of that for years. Do you remember the story?"

"Yeah, but you tell it."

"He certainly didn't want to go into the hospital."

"I know."

He turned his face up and a twinge of pain passed across it—we would not speak of the pain, we would not remark on it—passed like a ripple on water and faded. He smiled. "It was an eloquent trip," he said.

"He worked the turnaround on you."

"Yes, he did."

"I've never understood how you let him pull it off."

"Those were strange times," Hazel said.

"Well, yes," Frank said.

"You had decided to take him to an institution."

"That's right. I'd had enough. He was living in Deer Run, in that old country store he'd rented and turned into an apartment. He'd hung sheets over the front window and set up a cot in back and he called it home. Everything except the dry goods was in place, so he was living among shelves and broken down drink coolers and an old wind-up cash register that he called the alarm clock. When he got up every morning he'd wind the handle and punch a key to make the bells ring. He

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was working at the cotton gin running the suction pipe for a while, until they caught him shooting debris—actually clothes—out of the pipe. He came to work drunk and decided to see what it would be like to suction his clothes, which he did: shirt, pants, baseball cap and finally shoes, this pair of brogans that looked like they were carved out of anthracite coal—right up the pipe with the cotton. Somebody looked around and there was Jake butt naked in a trailer full of cotton sending everything sucking up into the ginning machinery. The shoes, he told me, broke the comber—you can't pluck seeds out of a shoe—and there were a couple of bales that wound up with bits of red shirt cloth sticking out of them like confetti. They ran him off from the gin like he was a snappish dog that had got loose, shooing him off I believe with their hats, and then his boss called Mama who called me to go up there and see about him. When I drove the fifteen miles to his house I found him sitting in the ditch among the goldenrod, still naked, drinking from a pint bottle of King Cotton Peach Wine. He hailed me like he'd been waiting for me to keep our appointment. God damn, I was mad. He was drunk—it was like there were lights shooting in his eyes—and he was as happy as he could be, sitting there sprinkling himself with flower heads and rabbit turds.

"I asked him if he wanted to go to the hospital—which I had called a couple of weeks before anyway (it was a place the mayor had told me about, where he sent his sister; they were supposed to be very strict and fine)—and he said sure; he'd be delighted, as he put it."

Frank shook his head and snorted a laugh. "I don't think now he ever realized he was the one supposed to go in the hospital. I believe he thought he was doing me a great favor in accompanying me to get treatment. Whatever, we went in the store and he got dressed and we packed a bag, and after showing me this tune he had picked out on the cash register—little puffs of dust shot up each time he pressed a key—I got him in the car and we headed off. He was wearing a black suit and

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a black tie—he looked like a funeral director—and he had slicked his hair back with grease which I had to wipe off the top of his head, and all the way there he kept up a running inventory of the native plants of Georgia and South Carolina. He told me all about mullein and sheep sorrel and tickseed sunflowers and butterfly weed and just about everything else that grew in the fields and the woods. He was back on his everything that lives has a soul kick and he wanted to make sure I realized he was talking about a great number of soulful creatures. 'It is an harmonious creation, my friend,' he would say and grin at me like he had just revealed the spiciest secret he knew. I was feeding him alcohol, which seemed to me the best method available to keep *him* content and it pretty much did the trick. There was a moment when he drew himself up and looked around and this funny look went across his face, like, *What am I doing here and what is going on?*, and he announced, very quietly, that ghosts danced in his body at night, and then he looked at me real sharply and said, 'If I wanted to I could jump out of this car and lizard right back home.' But he stayed put, even when I stopped for gas.

"I thought it was all going pretty well, and I was a little amazed that maybe we were finally getting through to the boy about how he had to do something about his condition. I was afraid to tell him much about the hospital, beyond that it was a place like summer camp where they had pleasant activities and gave you good food—I didn't know much about it myself—but nothing I said seemed to disturb him. Once we got to South Carolina he got quiet and just watched the countryside as we passed, occasionally mentioning the name of some flower that was native to the state. I even started congratulating myself at how smoothly things were going. Well, we got to Jorie finally and after asking directions at a filling station I was able to find the hospital. It was pretty late and the hospital was outside of town in the farm country. I started to feel a little bad about what I was doing—he was so quiet and peaceable—and when I saw it, this ramshackle white

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frame building with floodlights shining on it, I wondered if I had made a mistake. Behind the building you could see the shape of a few low mountains and they were so dark and unidentifiable and the place was so worn looking that I almost turned around. But Jake, who still didn't seem to quite catch what we were doing, patted me on the knee and grinned, and I thought Oh Lord please help us both. I pulled up in front and went back to the trunk to get out his suitcase, which was my mistake. Oh, man. I didn't go right in because I wanted time to say another little prayer—it was really eating at me that I was about to leave my own brother here all alone in this far place; he seemed so vulnerable and helpless—and so I bought myself a little time by dealing with the suitcase. Meanwhile, Jake, that scamp, went into the hospital and told them at the receiving desk that he was delivering his brother for treatment. Jesus. He was the one in the suit, and the booze had set him up straight and *they* didn't know which of us was which. I was so upset about what I was doing that I had walked away from the car out onto the lawn under some persimmon trees where I could be alone for a minute—oh my poor brother, I kept thinking, my poor helpless brother—when two guys in white approached me. Both of them shook my hand and told me to come along with them—I was kind of grateful that they were conscientious enough to come out for me—and it wasn't until they got me inside and started unlocking this metal door and leading me through that I asked them what was up. 'It'll be just fine, Mr. Jackson,' one of them said and I looked at him—he was a beefy guy with bright little eyes like watermelon seeds—and asked him what did he mean it'll be just fine, but he just gave me this little sly, reptilian smile and then the other one—a tall guy with scrawny-looking forearms—gave me just the littlest bit of a shove to get me through the door and I thought, what in the hell kind of deal is this, and I said, 'Wait a minute, have we got this thing straight?' The tall boy said yes we have it just as straight as we need it and pretty soon you—meaning me—will get straight

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too, and I thought Lord help me what has Jake Jackson done, and I started to protest—quite loudly as it turned out—but they already had me inside the door and even though I laid the beefy one out right there on the floor, another gang of them rushed out of this little glassed-in room on the corner and got me down. I have to say they got the best of me. It's rare, but it happened. What the fuckers did was wrap me in sheets, strap me to a bed in this place that looked like a shower room and pour ice water on me. Oh, god, I was screaming like crazy, and all the time that son of a bitch Jake was out there thanking the staff for taking such good care of his brother and assuring them that he would be back directly to look in on me—he even wrote a check for six hundred dollars which covered the first two weeks—and then he got in the car and drove back home."

By this time Hazel and I were laughing. It was a story we had heard many times, but we always liked to hear it again. "What happened then?" I said.

"Well, I was up there for over a week. At first they wouldn't believe I was not Jake. And they had also pumped me so full of sedatives that I didn't even start trying to tell them who I was until I'd been there three or four days. Jake—he was gone, split for his storefront in Deer Run; Mama didn't know to check on me, and I was so drugged I couldn't seem to get the motivation up to do anything. Finally I came to and started protesting. They wouldn't believe me. I told them to look at the ID in my billfold—which they had in their possession—but if they did it didn't change their minds. I don't know what they thought, I guess they thought I'd stolen Jake's ID or something. Anyway they just put me right in with the rest of the folks, and there I was sitting in a circle in a little group talking about what my favorite color was and lying on the floor pretending I was floating on the ocean. I wasn't the only guy there who thought he was wrongly accused; there were several of us. They smiled and said yes ma'am and yes sir, but I could tell that the minute they got out of that joint they were head-

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ing for the first bar they could find. The authorities—by which I mean these people that called themselves counselors, like we were at camp or something—figured I was just another of the incorrigibles and they yeah-yeahed me and assured me that I was coming along just fine. I didn't know what to do. Finally, after the first week or so they let me make a phone call and I called Mama and told her what the situation was and got her to get ahold of Tommy Sims, the lawyer, who got me out of there. I actually wound up getting ten days of treatment for free because they were afraid if they made me pay I would sue them. But it was funny, I didn't want to sue them, because by the time they let me go I was getting to like it. The other patients had elected me vice president of the ward and I'd found me a buddy, this overwrought little Italian guy who I think was more schizo than drunk, but who was the best damn chess player I ever met. We got so we kept a game going all the time, which we'd pick up between therapy sessions and all, and even though he'd try to kill himself whenever he lost—which wasn't that frequent—he was a lovely fellow and a true friend. He used to come in the Day Room and draw pictures on the blackboard of a guy pointing a pistol at his own head—his way of reminding the staff I guess that he was really in trouble—but except for the occasional pint somebody hid under their mattress, there weren't any real ways to get in trouble in there—except what you couldn't put aside from your own mind—so Ralph and I did pretty well, playing chess all day and drinking Coca Colas. Ralph got out a little after I did and went back home to Atlanta. For a while he wrote me letters, but then we drifted apart and I never heard from him again. It was a wild time all right."

He leaned down on an elbow and poked the fire. The light brightened his broad face, sweetening the features; for a moment he looked young and fresh, unharmed. Listening to him I had begun to think how grateful I was to have known him all my life. There had been stories like this between us since we were little boys, since the time we hid out in the bamboo

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patch behind his house wearing hats made of tin foil making up the adventures we would someday accomplish. And if I knew that what was passing now for an adventure was merely the rotted rind of times past, so askew and discordant that the old music could no longer be discerned, still, still I knew no other way than to strike up the ragged band one more time, call out the names of the old rollicking tunes and demand that the maestro play on, play on. This moment of easy tale-telling passed as it was all bound to pass; it was only an interlude, a moment in our wrenched lives when we were as harmonious and attuned as we had ever been—simply in the telling of one of the old tales—a moment such as an athlete might find again, when once more, arrived on the field for an old-timer's game, he becomes for a few seconds, for the first steps he takes toward the high-arching fly ball, the young fluid genius he once was. Perhaps this kind of retrieval is an attempt to redeem ourselves, to recreate again in the simplified patches of time, moments when our lives were livable and ordered. Perhaps it is only in the telling of the tales that this is so, for surely I remember the facts of the time of which Frank spoke, those days when he still struggled with his brother to force him into a manhood that would support and reward him, days that until now I thought ended long before his body was found laid out in fresh clothes on a rumpled bed on the outskirts of Calaree, Georgia. The tale was poignant and hilarious, and it was distant, polished by time and retelling like a heap of sacred bones, but if it was now become a talisman, isolate and to be worshipped, it had once been only a bead on a necklace, one of many beads on a string that grew longer, that was not completed yet, would not ever be completed.

When he got home from the hospital Frank drove out to the storefront in Deer Run and thrashed Jake to within an inch of his life. He beat him, I think, with a cane fishing pole he found on the floor of the abandoned store. I heard that Jake cried and begged his brother to stop, but Frank didn't, not until Jake lay on the cold concrete floor, sprawled in a pool of

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his own back blood. Then he threw the pole down, stumbled out into the yard, fell to his knees and wept, as if all the hope in his life were gone.

Now Frank, drawing with his finger small circles in the sand before the fire, gazed with a steady regard at the scuffed coffin which lay in the sand a little ways down the beach slope. The light from the fire played over its white skin, waving tongued shadows over its rigid angles, dancing upon the smooth, implacable surface. We were twenty miles north of Skye. Tomorrow would see us home.

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William Styron

Family Album

A Paris Review Series

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Rose's and my wedding at the Campidoglio in 1953. The dour man to my left is the Mayor of Rome. Like the captain of a ship, he has the power invested in him to marry. This is after the ceremony. From left in the picture are Rose's brother and sister-in-law, Anne Wigglesworth (in back), Marian Shaw, Irwin Shaw, John Marquand, Tom Guinzburg, Peter Matthiessen, Bobby and Claire White, and Frank Wigglesworth. Frank Wigglesworth was a musician at the Academy, one of the old Boston Wigglesworth family. He still looks exactly like this, this thirty-some years later.

Peter and Tom flew down from Paris for the ceremony. Irwin Shaw telegramed an invitation and they'd called back saying, "Can't do." So he sent another: "Please reconsider. After all a man only gets married two or three times in his life."

* * *

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William Blackburn was a professor of English at Duke, an Elizabethan expert, but he also taught creative writing at a time when it was really just beginning as a discipline in the colleges. I was attracted to him; he was a wonderfully lugubrious sort of saturnine man who always gave an air of defeat and despair but had a great reservoir of wit. It was he who encouraged me to become a writer . . . saw some spark . . . I guess this is why I have never been the opponent of creative writing, so called, that some cynics are. I've always felt that anything that involves encouragement of writing, if it's genuine, is good for writing.

Among his students was a tall, rather goofy-looking fellow with a big smile, black hair, in a V-12 program sailor's suit. His name was Henry Hyde; he later became the Republican Congressman from Illinois who at the Iran-contra hearings kept saying that Ollie North was a hero. Reynolds Price was probably Blackburn's best-known other student along with Mac Hyman, who wrote *No Time for Sergeants*, and who died, unfortunately, very young.

This picture was taken at Ravello in 1953, not far from the place that later became Gore Vidal's villa. Rose and I had just gotten married and Blackburn came over. He was a wonderful teacher. A tremendous sense of the dramatic. He was a kind

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of frustrated actor, and he loved to read Ben Jonson's plays and masques, and Spenser. He loved *Epithalamion* and he would read it to the class and as he read, you would see a tear fall, a genuine tear. His lips would tremble . . . he was deeply moved, which is what poetry is supposed to do. That he had that sense of transmission of emotional and aesthetic energy was really quite wild.

* * *

This photo's of Hiram and Mary Haydn. Also in Ravello. He was my mentor after Blackburn, when I came to New York. He was teaching at the New School. I had heard about his class, I think Blackburn told me about it. I went and enrolled. I hit it off very well with Hiram. An editor at Crown, he signed

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me up to my first contract in book publishing. He gave me an option. I remember the check. It was $100. He said, "Now this is not a great deal of money, but . . ." Well, I thought it was quite a bit of money. I was delighted. That was the contract for what eventually became *Lie Down in Darkness*. By the time the book was published, he'd moved to Bobbs-Merrill and I followed him. He was enthusiastic. The book was on the bestseller list with Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* and *From Here to Eternity*. That was the year *Time* magazine said it was a poor year for first novels, mentioning these three as examples. . .

* * *

This is a picture of my daughter Alexandra and Bob Brustein's son taken on Martha's Vineyard around 1970. Brustein is the head of the American Repertory Theater at Harvard. Both of the children little tots, as you can tell. The picture was taken by my son Tom who was about twelve. He had tied them up as a joke—some Indian drama—and then took this picture. I had salvaged it from an album last summer and showed it to Bob as an example of childhood escapades, quite harmless,

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I thought. Bob was amused by it and took it home as a piece of memorabilia. He left it somewhere, on the the top of the refrigerator quite possibly. Soon after, a television repair man came in and in the process of doing his work spotted this picture and took it away with him. The next day Bob got a call from the state police who wondered if they could come around and talk to him. It was not a particularly pleasant visit. They told him that he was suspected of being a child molester. They had a photograph in their possession. It caused a hell of a problem. Bob called me in a panic. Fortunately, Al, my daughter, who is now twenty, was here and told the policeman over the telephone that *she* was the victim fifteen years before, that it was all harmless. But it dragged on and on. They didn't believe her; they continued to harass Brustein in a subtle, but nonetheless rather frightening way. Finally the story got around the island. Everybody got indignant about this preposterous accusation—Bob Brustein a molester of five and six year-old children—and a kind of counter-attack was launched. I called up the cop. I said I was the father of one of the so-called victims. I could assure him that it was all totally innocent. Finally, the whole thing was resolved. The picture was sent back. We never discovered the identity of the television repair man who started the whole thing.

Not much of a picture, is it? It was the first picture Tom had ever taken. Indians and hostages. Total innocence! Of course there was a lot of solemn talk, "Well, there is a great deal of child molestation going on and the poor repairman was only acting on good instincts." Well, this is what happens in a pious society like ours. A lot of pieties about the nobility of the repairman's purpose and all that bullshit.

* * *

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An evening with Leonard Bernstein amounts to a kind of controlled chaos. The Styrons and the Bernsteins have a long-standing Christmas tradition—at least fifteen years. Lenny does the maestro bit. He doesn't play carols conventionally. He does a lot of boogie-woogie. A lot of riffs. Not easy to sing to. He is extremely dictatorial about voices that go off-key.

Lenny always hams it up with "Partridge in a Pear Tree." One time, quite drunk, I made that line "eight milkmaids leaping" into "eight milk*men* jumping". Lennie always stops me and says "Jesus Christ!" Every year.

* * *

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Yevtushenko is the most atrocious eater I have ever met in my life. He's eating a whole half of a goose. The grease would slide down his hands, his face a mask of grease. He always said this is the only way to eat a goose. I guess it's the Russian way of eating geese. He's a perfectly reasonable eater of other foods. But geese and other fowl, I think, led him to this incredibly vomity spectacle of actually becoming part of the goose.

When he is away from a goose Yevtushenko is quite civilized, and we've had good times together in Russia and other places.

* * *

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This is of Norman Mailer and me in a lake in Connecticut, late 1950s. We were neighbors and great friends, living the life of young country gentlemen. I was working on my second novel. Among other things, Norman was working on that famous essay of his "The White Negro." I was the first person he read it to. It knocked me out. I also remember a lot of extraordinary parties from that time. The Twist had just arrived on the scene, along with pot, and we were preparing for the sixties with some activities that got pretty Dionysian.

I can't remember what this must have been all about. It may be that Norman had mounted a submarine attack.

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It was a Poets and Writers benefit in the early 1980s. Betty Bacall and I were the co-hosts and it was at Roseland. My final ambition had been consummated because on the big marquee it said, "Lauren Bacall and William Styron" . . . huge lights on Broadway!

Mailer was there. I hadn't spoken to him for many years, nor he to me. We had a falling-out many years before having to do with a foolish sort of rivalry. It was a falling-out over nothing. We both agreed it was time to make up. The reconciliation. There it is. We both rather amiably looked forward to it.

Some photographers asked if we could pose. Instead of doing what we had been doing for twenty-five years, which is turning abruptly away after leering at each other, or glowering, we grinned and became pals, briefly. About six or seven months afterwards we really patched it up. It had to do with the Jack Abbott parole. When Abbott, whom Mailer had stood up for, stabbed the guy to death, there was a big furor in all the newspapers. Mailer was considered the chief culprit by a lot of the people. I had gone through something like it here in Connecticut many years before. A guy called Ben Reid had gone bad. He had been ready to be paroled and at the very last minute he got loose, committed a rape, was captured

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and sentenced again. He's the guy I put my faith in, and he betrayed it. But I had always been philosophical about it. While hideously disappointed, I still think the system works. It's been statistically proven that most people who are paroled do not do that. In fact, most people who are paroled are very safe risks. But I had been burned, and when I saw what happened to Mailer, I felt this sympathy for him. At a symposium, which was reported in the newspapers, I stated that Mailer should not be held responsible in any way. He had probably made a bad judgment. You can feel disappointed by it, but you can't consider it a crime. A month later, I got a letter from Norman, a rather hesitant, stiff letter saying, in effect: "Dear Bill, It's taken me a long time to come around to this opinion I've had . . ." Typical Mailer, not allowing himself too much leeway or room for emotion. But the final few lines said: ". . . but I've finally agreed to myself that I would write to you and say it was damn sporting of you . . ."—or something like that—". . .to have said what you did, and I appreciate it." After an appropriately dignified time, I wrote him back and I said: "Thanks for the letter. I'm glad we see eye-to-eye on something. I'm glad you wrote it."

It was a stupid split. We could have been much better off as allies rather than enemies. When we got back together as friends, I've always been very happy about that. Had we any ideological reason to be hostile to each other, it would have been different. But we had none; we were both on the same side spiritually, and still are.

* * *

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Good God, what is this? I guess it's Carlos Fuentes; he's got his tongue out. I don't know what's going on. I believe this was taken in Mexico, though I couldn't swear. I can only say that it baffles me.

* * *

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This is Jimmy Baldwin, taken out back. In 1960–61 Bob Silvers was telling me, "Well, you know, he's having a terrifically hard time financially. He supports his whole family." What he really needed was a place to get away and live for the winter. So he came up and lived in the little house which I use off and on as a studio. He wrote most of *Another Country* and also he did notes for *The Fire Next Time*. He spent a lot of time horsing around on the nearby lecture circuit. He'd go to places like Westport. He'd come back and there'd be a car which had trailed him, and in it a woman, a young girl with a guitar and a dirndl and knit socks and big tits who had some mistaken notion that she could go to bed with Jimmy. These were the really innocent days before the sixties really got started. They didn't know that Jimmy was gay, but they were smitten by him because he represented some kind of beginning of the revolution. At some synagogue off in Fairfield or Westport or New Haven he would have laid them out, telling them, "Baby, shape up, because the revolution's coming." He'd turn 'em on

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with this fierce rhetoric. They were knocked out by it and, of course, they got their signals mixed. They'd come up here. He had one he just couldn't dislodge. She was determined to get into his pants and he was just as determined not to let her. He'd come over here, floundering through the snow drifts saying, "Baby, let me outta here!"

I learned a lot from Jimmy that winter. I hadn't written *Nat Turner*, but I was collecting notes and making outlines. Jimmy'd heard of the name Nat Turner, but knew nothing about him. He thought it was wonderful for me to write it. He defended me right down the line. I think he was a little worried because he had mixed allegiances. When the book came out, I don't think he necessarily wanted to be on my side, but he was.

* * *

This is at the New York Athletic Club. E. L. Doctorow and Rose Sergio and Ramirez, the Vice President of Nicaragua. We

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had just met at this dinner. I was tickled to death . . . quite in awe that the Vice President of Nicaragua had turned up. But he was in awe of Kurt Vonnegut, Ed Doctorow and myself, because he's a novelist and the Sandinistas are a famous tribe of novelists and poets. I think he really had looked forward to this dinner in a way that was as intense as mine because he was finally with some North American writers he admired. He was the kind of person who would say, "Tell me, what is Ken Kesey really like?" or "Have you seen Joyce Carol Oates recently?" The *Vice President of Nicaragua!* It tickles me that this nation of poets is being besieged by this famous anti-poet, Ronald Reagan.

He talked about the congressmen coming down to Managua. They come down in a bloc and sit in the American Embassy, about a dozen congressmen. Some of the Democrats, he says, are pretty good. But he could not describe without falling into a rage some of the incredible tirades that Republican congressmen have made, pointing their finger at him and talking to him, as he said, "like a bootblack." "You gotta do this, you gotta do that, you people . . ." He said the humiliation was beyond belief.

* * *

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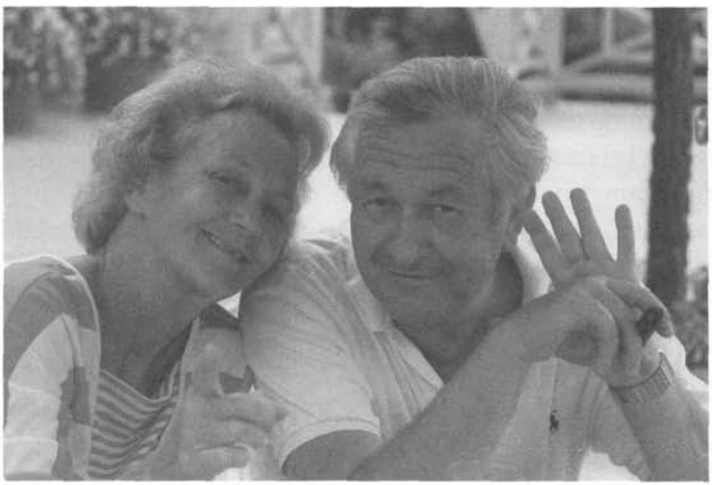

Kay Graham of the Washington Post threw a party in honor of the Reagans. She gives wonderful parties, a great hostess, great woman. After the dinner—it wasn't a very big party, maybe twenty, twenty-five people—we sat around the coffee table listening to Ronnie for an hour and a half describe his days in Hollywood. It was one anecdote after another about show biz. They were all dead-head stories about George Burns and Gracie Allen, the Warner brothers, getting lost in the Hollywood Hills with George Burns in the car—that sort of thing. Basically dumb stories with no point. Mike Nichols was sitting next to me and he looked over in the middle of this rambling monologue and mouthed the words. "It's a nightmare." I barely was able to restrain myself.

Kay was in the other room with Nancy. There were one or two women, but mostly the males had gathered with the cigars and cognac. What was appalling was that if you had a show-biz president who was funny, he would be off the hook. But it was dull, monotonous, banal.

I've been told on good authority that Gorbachev was briefed by his advisors to expect absolutely nothing: in terms of personal relationships he was going to meet a zero. Gorbachev has class, let's face it. I went down to Washington and met him. He sat there and he talked eloquently, funnily, wittily,

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thoughtfully. All improvised. He had one or two notes. I was sitting fairly close to him; he would look at a card once every seven or eight minutes. The idea of Reagan doing this to a group of, say, Russian intellectuals or Russian whatever, was simply inconceivable. He just couldn't have done it. We've had a president for eight years who's a used-car salesman. It's a tragedy in American democracy that we voted him in. It's a reflection of us as a people. It really revealed what everyone has known all along . . . that the highest ideal in America is entertainment. We've got an entertainer for a president. It's what we've always wanted. Except in this case, he's forgotten how to entertain.

* * *

Well, I have to confess to being a bit of an entertainer *manqué* myself. Milos Forman asked me if I wanted to be in *Ragtime.* Would I do a screen test? I said of course. As a frustrated

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movie star, who wouldn't? So, I went down to New York once or twice and put on a moustache, make-up and that's Mary Steenburgen who played the part of the mother. I was going to play the part of the father. The problem was I couldn't remember my lines. I was hopeless! I couldn't remember twelve consecutive lines. Also, I think I was a fairly wooden actor. At any rate, I didn't get the part, but I wanted it badly. She's a sweetheart, Mary Steenburgen. She kept whispering, "say this, say that. . ."

* * *

This is dinner in New York after I was made a Commander in the Legion of Honor at the French Consulate. That's Gloria Jones in the center, and Willie Morris. The profile on the left with cigar is my editor at Random House, Bob Loomis. I got quite a kick out of this honor since the French don't often bestow the medal on writers, especially foreigners. And I'd be falsely modest if I said I didn't like wearing that pretty little rosette. But I do have mixed feelings about awards and prizes.

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If they come your way that's fine, but often too much is made of them. The stir about Toni Morrison and the Pulitzer Prize left a bad taste in everyone's mouth. I think they're fine when they are a simply recognition for general achievement. But often they're temporary merit badges, and not genuine badges at that. Until they're all outlawed, though, we'll continue to have to put up with the mixed delight and resentment they produce. Naturally, it's a cliché to say that one's work, and the effect it has on others, is all that matters, but that's fine. Willie Morris gave me the greatest tribute for the Legion of Honor. You know, he's the chief speech writer for John Leslie, who is His Worship, the Lord Mayor of Oxford, Mississippi. I've dug up the letter that he wrote for the mayor on the occasion. It reads in part:

"At the very moment this letter is being read up there in New York City, the University of Mississippi marching band is on our courthouse square playing "Dixie" and "The Marseilles" [sic] in your honor, and the majorettes, who include three former Miss Americas, are performing pirouettes and arabesques and doing wide knee splits for you."

Now that's glory.

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Two Contemporary East German Poets

East Germany has never lacked for gifted poets; its problem has been holding on to them. In the aftermath of Wolf Biermann's expatriation in the mid-70s, bankrupt cultural politics caused even such left-thinking writers as Günter Kunert to leave for the West. In some ways, Ulrich Berkes is a bridge from Biermann's generation to Steffen Mensching's. Berkes' two books of poems (the first consisting entirely of prose poems) are mainly focused on the immediate surroundings of his daily life, and on travel—whether in the figure of Orpheus, Icarus, or Rimbaud. This politically disengaged stance typifies the way many writers reacted when they saw the dire consequences of unorthodox political involvement.

Since the early 1980s, the new generation of poets (including Mensching, Uwe Kolbe, Thomas Boehme, and others) has seemed once again willing to probe the bounds of the acceptable. While some poets such as Sascha Anderson headed West, others of true talent stayed on. Mensching, for example, has met with exceptional critical and popular success (he was just twenty-six when he received the East German equivalent of the Yale Younger Poets award in 1985). His best poems are those in which past and present, history and the quotidian, play off each other. In others it is the political and the personal (often sexual) which are brought together to create an intimate tension.

It is to be hoped that Berkes, Mensching, and their fellow poets can keep writing not only as they are, but where they are, for the sake of readers everywhere. We have all read enough of the poetry of exile.

—George Kane

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Five Poems by Ulrich Berkes

Exaggerated Self-Portrait

1

I am a poet
I own no car no television set no washing machine
I like drinking strong tea best
I can wield a scythe and sickle
I ride a rusty red bicycle
I visit friends, friends visit me
I write mostly with a pencil
I have hitchhiked through Poland twice
I love and am loved in return, that is all
I listen to music by Mahler, Pink Floyd, and Matthias Reihs
I saved a boy from drowning
I would like to have just 50 books, but alas have 66
I wanted to be a painter, and before that a pilot
I avoid taking walks
I have a fear of flying
I have been living in a condemned house for seven years
I like being quiet
I paint occasionally, with Dutch oils
I feel responsible
I don't have much interest in the weather
I try to avoid writing at a desk
I was born under the sign of Taurus
I keep a journal, not for publication
I am 5'11" and weigh 156 lbs.
I read Lautréamont, Rimbaud, W.H. Auden, Genet, Allen Ginsberg, Hubert Fichte
I still heard the detonations of bombs, saw houses burning
I use an English razor
I have been doing prose-poems for years

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I sometimes go to movies, stores or churches
I once dreamt that I was in Paris
I don't intend to write a novel
I am obstinate
I know how to prepare meat with onions curried rice and stewed fruit
I often light candles
I have little use for games of chance and jokes
I believe in the saying by Heraclitus: "And as one and the same within us is the living and the dead and the waking and sleeping and young and old"
I nearly died of malnutrition as a child
I believe that living and writing must be one
I am not ambitious
I like old pharmacies
I am not afraid of saying the banal

1980

2

I am not a poet
I dust, swallow tablets, polish shoes, listen to news, swim, buy stamps, write poems, drink beer
I live in a housing project now
I live with contradictions
I don't smoke any more
I swim naked
I am afraid of heights
I am loyal
I grin inwardly when things get hopping
I like eating bockwurst best
I will never get the Nobel Prize for literature
I get more carefree all the time
I steal lines from foreign poems
I envy no one
I have varicose veins

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I only cross the street when the light is green
I would like to see Fellini's "Satyricon" again
I take pictures of run-down houses
I work slowly, with doubts, with secret pleasure
I have no secrets
I am descended from shepherds and farmers
I speak directly
I don't weigh every word
I sometimes speak ironically
I can't write prose-poems anymore
I am self-confident
I am against war
I am never bored
I *think of myself as a materialist*
I use eau de cologne
I am not yet included in the author's directory
I keep going
I work at a machine
I do not strive for completeness
I amble down Friedrichstrasse
I put my hand on your knee
"I do this, I do that" (Frank O'Hara)
I say: my poem is your poem too

1982

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I Was Icarus

It must have been a hot summer back then, when I could fly.
I was maybe seventeen.
My room was on the ground floor, facing the back.
Night after night I lay on the bed and imagined myself flying.
That was a strain, I tell you.
Usually I'd lie perfectly still for an hour before my body rose from the bed.
Very slowly I rose, until I hovered a meter or so off the floor.
Then with swimming strokes I propelled myself through the open window.
Outside I flew higher and higher, over the garden fence, over the clothes-lines, over the roof tops and the apple-trees on the outskirts of town.
The entire flight I felt the wind's touch on my skin,
and sometimes I heard voices, calling.

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Remington Portable

I'm typing this poem
on a black portable typewriter
with the serial number C 27 707
made in U.S.A. in 1930
one has to lift up the type-bar first
I inherited it last weekend
when the belongings of an aunt
in Pankow were divided
she is in the final stages of cancer
and lies in the hospital
actually we didn't want to take anything with us
just a large oil painting in a gold frame
but in the end we carted off
not only a little bookcase and a lamp
but a toaster oven as well
and even a silver-plated sugar spoon
ever and always this craving for things
now I possess three typewriters

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Orpheus

Orpheus wanders through the Prenzlau
Mountains in December, seeks new friends
among the icy streets, hangs his
plastic bag on the door of a rear-entrance

apartment and disappears again. In
the bag is a sweater, his money and
The Stages of the Cross. Orpheus comes
from the coast, is nineteen, blond

slender and epileptic, does not
smoke or drink, lives only for music.
He composes short pieces for piano,
one called *Suicide*, another, *Black Azure.*

I don't know if he moves stones,
or whether animals and people follow him,
but he must not turn around on
his way, only keep going, singing.

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Theocritus

Having a coke with you is much better than reading classical idylls, and I don't envy that Greek's two thousand years of fame, for he had no one at his side to help him buy a book about a schizophrenic poet, or to go for a walk with on a blue March Sunday in the Connewitz Woods.

He composed elaborate complaints when his love was not returned, while I photograph you in front of a fallen-down tree and it occurs to me again that you resemble a young, dreamy shepherd in winter, who is absolutely indifferent to whether I write poems or for that matter catch cuttlefish.

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Five Poems by Steffen Mensching

Did you notice that the American soldier

Did you notice that the American soldier in the bookstore
At the cash register was buying a picture book, for children
Five years and up, with exotic apes and rhinoceroses, that he
Smiled at you and fumbled with his uniform button
When you smiled back, and that this moment, a second
Or two, was very peculiar, so desperate
Utopian foolish hopeful timeless brief disarming.

In a hotel room in Meissen I read

In a hotel room in Meissen I read:
Not a line remains by Cleophon,
Greek epic poet, no date.
His only splinter of fame
Is to be twice mentioned in the Poetics
Of Aristotle. *He presents us*
With everyday people. I see him
Sweating to bend a hexameter.
That language is clearest which consists
Only of ordinary words.
And what more do I want. *But the effect is flat.*
Says Aristotle. *An example*
Is the poetry of Cleophon. And what if
He had known it, I think,
And lay the ballpoint pen slowly
On the white sheet of paper.

So white was the morning

So white was the morning, so
Obviously of a good fabric, so pale
And useless, that I asked you, what
Have they hidden behind it

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Official Telephone Book, Reich Postal District Berlin, 1941

I dial the old numbers.
Nothing but dial tones.
Beeeeep, beeeeep, high-pitched monotone buzzes.
No one lifts the receiver:
Ninety-six, zero-four, twenty-nine,
Erich Kästner, Roscherstrasse 16,
Flinches and continues writing
The Münchhausen film,
While in the Heinkel Works in Oranienburg
People are hard at work,
And Professor Arno Breker in Dahlem,
In the Government Studio,
Hammers away at a Nordic giant.
No one lifts the receiver:
Not Karl Hofer or Günter Eich or Herr Ardenne.
They are not at home
Or have stopped using the phone
Because one can never be sure just
Who is listening in. Beeeeep, beeeeep, Pastor Niemöller
And the Jewish Cultural League
Are unreachable: four-two, stop it! five-nine
Go away! two-one. No cause
For concern, says Frau Dr. Lewisson, Gertrud Sara,
And prescribes medicine
For gastritis, in Charlottenburg, Sybelstrasse 49,
Office hours daily
From 4 to 6, except Saturday.
But in September
A different doctor will answer under her name.
Still I pore
Over the red phone book and find Dr. Adenauer
Who has a rosy future,
And the State Secret Police Station of Berlin
Where the officials

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Have no hand free for the telephone
Which rings continuously,
And on page one thousand two hundred twenty-six
Harro Schulze-Boysen,
Who doesn't yet know that he's already dead.
In the kitchen he thinks
Of the comrades in Moscow who've been warned
But they don't hear him,
And my Uncle Hans, Government Advisor,
In Zehlendorf, doesn't hear me either:
I call to him: Your son will die
In just six months
Near Smolensk with a bullet in his stomach,
And his son Klaus lies
On his stomach next to his new girl friend
On the Wannsee beach
And has no idea where Smolensk lies.
Beeeep, beeeep, beeeep.
And I can't get any connection
By telegram:
Forty-one, eleven, and eleven: a dispatch
To my future parents:
URGENT STOP YOU MUST BE CAREFUL STOP AT ALMOST
ANY PRICE STOP I'M COMING IN 17 YEARS.
But no one picks up the receiver. The only connection
Exists in my head.
The year 41 is busy: Beeeeep, beeeeep, beeeeep,
A long unbroken tone.

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Torn and Tattered Elegy in Black

Europe. All in white.
Bobbysocks. Linen trousers. Tennis player.
Sexy. But unpractical
Clean uniform skin-deep.

Don't get your hands dirty anymore.
I don't know,

Is white the stylish color
Before battle. The tanks are still standing
In the toy stores.

Why then do I see black.

Against the dark figures and lines of the newspapers
No stain remover is to be found.

Don't you smell it.
No, not the cologne.

Ach, says the girl.
And blowdries her hair.
(The blond strands finally settle over her forehead.)

There, that's chic.

The freshly washed white cotton skirt flutters in the window
Like a flag.

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J. P. Donleavy and John Irving

An Exchange

Co. Westmeath
Ireland

28th April 1987

To the Editor:

With reference to your interview with John Irving appearing in your Winter 1987 edition in which Mr. Irving alleges I was rude and snubbed Mr. John Cheever during a visit to Iowa:

I was not carrying a cane at the time but remember a request from Mr. Irving to speak with him privately which I did and during which meeting I suggested to him, that if he had the option to leave the cosy world of teaching, it was better to go suffer and pursue a writing career outside of university. This advice he seems to have taken, and I'm told, he was heard to mention it on a radio broadcast some years ago. As for snubbing Mr. John Cheever, I distinctly recall pleasantly meeting this distinguished gentleman in his classroom during one of his teaching sessions. Also, I am informed by the friend sending me this cutting from the Paris Review that one of Mr. Cheever's students (now a published novelist), was at the time at Iowa and was present at my talk and quotes Mr. Cheever as saying he thought the lecture and reading wonderful and that one's tailoring was sublime. As someone who has always only dressed to keep warm and comfortable, Mr. Cheever's reference to my tailoring comes as a surprise but clearly is not the remark of a man who has felt snubbed, and I suspect there is some other reason for Mr. Irving's remarks.

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It is true that I do not have untold sympathy for the American academic fraternity nor did I keep up with the literary scene then, nor do I now. But I note in the paragraph on page 95 preceding this present above matter, that Mr. Irving refers to the interchangeable use of "I" as a first person narrator with third person narrator. At least it is evident that this device, first used in The Ginger Man, has made an impression on Mr. Irving. All this has come to my attention not as a subscriber nor as a recipient of complimentary copies of the Paris Review and which latter I assure Mr. Plimpton I do not receive.

(signed)
J. P. Donleavy

Sagaponack, New York

9 June 1987

To the Editor:

I'm sorry you had to suffer that arcane and mannered flapdoodle from Mr. Donleavy; although—as I said in the interview—"if the story embarrasses him, or makes him angry, I would say we're even; the evening (described in the interview) embarrassed Cheever and me, and made us angry, too." Although I do not credit my memory of 1972–75 as *exact*, I believe that my memory of Mr. Donleavy's behavior in Iowa City is far more accurate than Mr. Donleavy's recollection.

It is spurious of Mr. Donleavy to contend that I took *his advice*: that it was "better to go suffer and pursue a writing career outside of university." I decided to pursue a writing career "outside of university" when I could afford not to teach; I never decided "to go suffer." And when Mr. Donleavy gave this advice, he did not do so "privately" but in a classroom where his remarks were hugely attended; in fact (and this puts it more strongly than I did in my interview), Donleavy suggested

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to the students that not only were they wasting their time being students of writing—that there was surely nothing they could be taught by writers such as myself (and Mr. Cheever) who had chosen the "cosy world of teaching."

But (as I said in the interview) my anger was for Cheever; he *was* snubbed, he *did* offer to point out to Mr. Donleavy that no *major* writer of fiction was ever a shit to another writer of fiction—those moments are as concrete in *my* memory as Mr. Donleavy's cane or walking stick; as concrete as my memory of how *proud* he was to not waste his time reading anyone living. This latter remark, I suppose, might be a form of *general* snubbing—to *all* of us living and working in a writers' community like Iowa City; we had, after all, read *him*.

And as for the student "(now a published novelist)"—the one who quotes Mr. Cheever as finding Mr. Donleavy's tailoring "sublime," and his reading and lecture "wonderful"—I admit to some wonderment; but Mr. Cheever, in my experience, was a polite man, or perhaps his remarks to the student (if true) were ironic . . . he was an ironic man, too.

To one point made by Mr. Donleavy, I must agree. As I said in my interview: I was, and remain, an admirer of *The Ginger Man*. The interchangeable use of a first- and third-person narrative voice indeed made an impression on me; although I thought that device called less attention to itself in *The Tin Drum*—which is why, in my interview, I praised Grass for handling that technique so "seamlessly."

Fondly,
(signed)
John Irving

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Thomas Glynn is the author of *Temporary Sanity*, *The Building*, and *Watching the Body Burn*. His short stories have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Playboy*, and previously in *The Paris Review*.

Ernst Havemann's stories have appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Grand Street*. His latest collection of stories, *Blood Song*, was published by Houghton Mifflin in 1987.

Charlie Smith is the author of the novel *Canaan* (1984) and the collection of poetry *Red Roads* (1987), which was a selection in the National Poetry Series. He won the Aga Khan Fiction Prize for his novella "Crystal River," which appeared in issue 88 of *The Paris Review*. His second novel, *Shine Hawk*, will be published this fall by Paris Review Editions.

David Foster Wallace is the author of a novel, *The Broom of the System* (Viking Penguin, 1987). "Little Expressionless Animals" is part of the collection *Girl With Curious Hair*, forthcoming from Viking Penguin.

POETRY

S. Ben-Tov's first book of poetry, *During Cease Fire*, was published by Harper & Row in 1985. Her recent work has appeared in *Harvard Magazine*, and she is working on a new collection of poems, *Herzl's Apple*. She is a past recipient of the Bernard F. Conners Poetry Prize.

João Cabral de Melo Neto has served as Brazil's ambassador to several countries and currently holds the post of Consul General to Portugal. His poetry

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has been translated into many languages. His most recent volume, *Agrestes*, was published in 1985. **Richard Zenith**'s poems and translations have appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Georgia Review*, *Partisan Review*, and *Massachusetts Review*. He translated for *Brazilian Poetry 1950–1980* (Wesleyan, 1983), and received a 1986 National Endowment for the Humanities grant to produce a bilingual anthology of Cabral de Melo Neto's poetry.

Tom Disch's *Three Books of Poetry*, comprising three volumes of his poetry published previously in Great Britain, is forthcoming from Doubleday.

Florence Elon's most recent books of poetry are *Flesh of His Flesh* and *Self-Made*. Her poems have appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*, *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *Sewanee Review*, and *London Magazine*. She has taught as a visiting writer at Berkeley, Northwestern, and Yale, and is currently on the faculty of George Washington University.

Daniel Mark Epstein is the author of several volumes of poetry, including *Young Men's Gold* and *The Book of Fortune*. "The Rivals" is from his forthcoming book *Spirits*, to be published by Overlook/Viking Press.

Irving Feldman's most recent collection of poems is *All of Us Here* (Viking Penguin, 1986). He teaches English at SUNY Buffalo.

Thom Gunn's most recent publication is the pamphlet of poems *The Hurtless Trees* (1986). His collection *The Passages of Joy* was published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux in 1982.

George Kane is in the Graduate Writing Program at Brown University. His poems have appeared in a number of literary journals. These are his first published translations. **Ulrich Berkes** has worked as a lathe-hand, metal-cutting machine operator, and teacher. He has published two books of poetry to date: *Icarus Over the City* (1976) and *Tandem* (1984). **Steffen Mensching** has published a chapbook and two books of poetry in East Germany. He has worked in radio and as an editor at the literary magazine *Temperamente*. He lives in East Berlin.

James Laughlin's most recent books are *Selected Poems 1935–1985* (City Lights, 1986), *The Owl of Minerva*, a book of poems (Copper Canyon Press, 1987), and *Pound as Wuz*, essays and lectures on Ezra Pound (Graywolf, 1987). He is the publisher of New Directions. A two-part interview with Laughlin, titled "The Art of Publishing," appeared in issues 89 and 90 of *The Paris Review*.

David Lehman is the author of *An Alternative to Speech*, a collection of poems (Princeton University Press, 1986), and the editor of *Ecstatic Occasions, Expedient Forms*, a poetry anthology (Macmillan). He is a book critic for *Newsweek* and a contributing editor of *Partisan Review*. Mr. Lehman's "Mythologies" has been selected as the winner of the 1987 Bernard F. Conners Prize. He was first published in *The Paris Review* in 1968.

William Logan's second book, *Difficulty*, was published earlier this year. He has recently returned from a year in England.

Christopher Logue is preparing, as a continuation of his *War Music*, a trans-

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lation of the first four books of Homer's *Iliad* titled *One to Four*. He recently wrote the screenplay for the upcoming film *Crusoe*.

Alice Mattison's book of poems *Animals* was published by Alice James Books in 1980, and she has just finished her second collection, *No Harm*. Her poems have appeared in *The Massachusetts Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Shenandoah*, and other magazines, and her stories have been published in *The New Yorker*.

Lynne McMahon's collection *Faith* is forthcoming from Wesleyan University Press.

Cynthia Nadelman is an art critic who lives in New York. She has published previously in *The Paris Review* and *5 a.m.*

Jim Powell has new poems forthcoming in *Poetry*, *Verse*, and *Chicago Review*. His first collection, *It Was Fever That Made the World*, was published this year by the University of Chicago Press.

Donald Revell's first collection of poems, *From the Abandoned Cities*, was published by Harper & Row. "Why History Imitates God" is from his new collection, *The Gaza of Winter*, to be published in early 1988 by the University of Georgia Press.

Betsy Rosenberg grew up in Ohio and Indiana and now lives in Jerusalem, where she works as a translator.

Umberto Saba, considered one of the most influential Italian poets of the twentieth century, died in 1957. The volume of his collected poetry is entitled *Canzonieri* (1961). **Michael Palma** has had translations published in numerous journals and in *Anthology of Poems from Italy* (1985). His translation of *My Name on the Wind: Selected Poems of Diego Valeri* is forthcoming from Princeton University Press. He is an Associate Professor of English at Iona College.

Hugh Seidman's books include *Collecting Evidence* (Yale), *Blood Lord* (Doubleday), and *Throne/Falcon/Eye* (Random House). He lives in New York City and teaches a poetry workshop at The New School.

Terese Svoboda's book *All Aberration* was published by the University of Georgia Press in 1985. *Cleaned The Crocodile's Teeth*, a book of translations from the Nuer language, was published by Greenfield Review Press, also in 1985.

David Trinidad's books include *Monday, Monday* (Cold Calm Press), *Living Doll* (Illuminati Press) and *November* (Hanuman Books). "Hand Over Heart" is the title poem of a recently completed manuscript. He lives in Los Angeles.

John Updike's latest novel, *S.*, was published in March by Alfred A. Knopf.

Marjorie Welish has had poems published in numerous journals, including *Partisan Review*, *Oink!*, and *Conjunctions*. Her books include *Handwritten* (Sun Press, 1979) and *Two Poems* (Z Press, 1978).

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FEATURE

William Styron is the author of five novels, including *Sophie's Choice*, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, which won the Pulitzer Prize, and *Lie Down in Darkness*, winner of the Prix de Rome of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He is an advisory editor of this magazine.

INTERVIEWS

Thomas Frick is art editor of the *Agni Review*. He recently received a Nan Weinstein Award for excellence in visual arts reporting. He writes frequently for *Art in America*.
Shusha Guppy is the London Editor of *The Paris Review*, and a regular contributor to the *Daily Telegraph*, British *Vogue*, and other periodicals.

ART

Elizabeth Murray was born in Chicago in 1940 and lives in New York. Recent one-woman exhibitions of her paintings and drawings have been held at the Dallas Museum of Art; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.
Mike and Doug Starn were born in Northfield, New Jersey, in 1961, and currently live in Boston. Their collaborative photographic works have been exhibited recently at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Ringling Museum, Sarasota, Florida; Stux Gallery, New York and Boston; and The Saatchi Collection, London.
Donald Sultan was born in Asheville, North Carolina, in 1951, and lives in New York. Recent one-man exhibitions have been held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Brooklyn Museum; and Blum Helman Gallery, New York.

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The Paris Review is pleased to announce:

- David Lehman's poem "Mythologies," published in this issue, is the winner of the Bernard F. Conners Poetry Prize.
- Ben Okri's "The Dream-Vendor's August" (issue 105) is the winner of the 1987 Aga Khan Fiction Prize.
- Mary Ann Taylor-Hall's "Banana Boats" (104) has been selected for the *Best American Short Stories* anthology.
- Rick Bass's "Where the Sea Used to Be" (102), Lawrence Shainberg's "Exorcising Beckett" (104), and Charles Wright's "December Journal" (104) have been selected for the *Pushcart Prize* XIII anthology.
- Joseph Brodsky's "To Urania" (103), Douglas Crase's "Dog Star Sale" (102), Donald Hall's "Prophecy" (103), John Koethe's "Mistral" (102), and Philip Levine's "A Walk with Tom Jefferson" (104) have been selected for the first *Best American Poetry* anthology.

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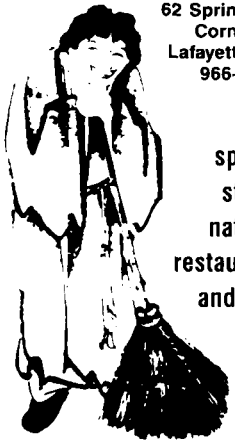

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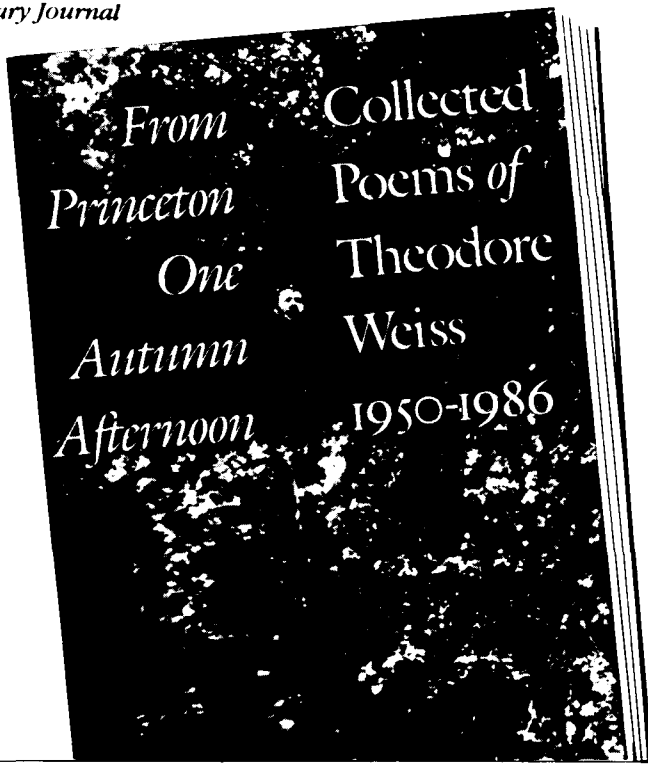

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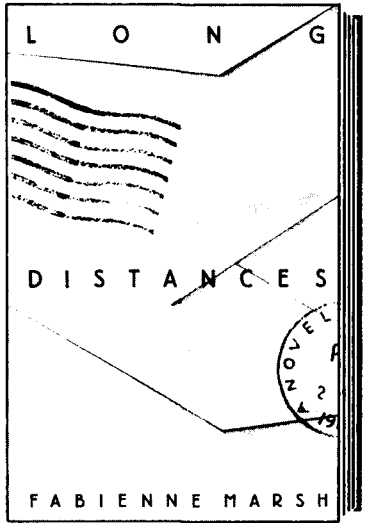

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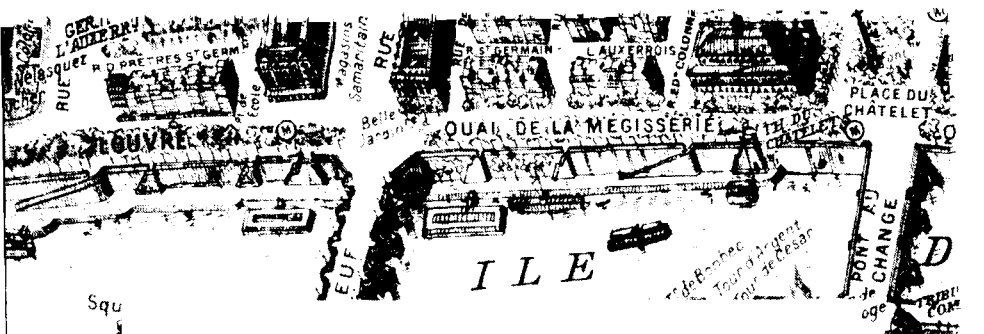

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—Dallas Wiebe, "Night Flight to Stockholm," Issue 73

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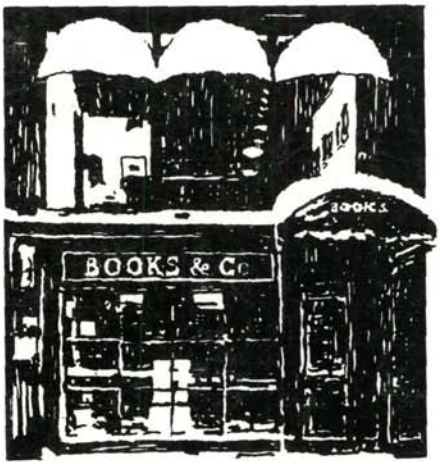

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—Gustave Flaubert,
in a letter, 1858

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